

Crimes & Punishments of Canadian Women BOOK TWO

JEAN-CLAUDE CASTEX



To Marie-France with Love

CRIMES & PUNISHMENTS

of

Canadian women

BOOK TWO

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Foreword

Old age, the antechamber of death, has always been a repellent in humans. In antiquity "even the Gods did not like the old¹." Uranus was "chastised by his son Kronos, himself a victim of Zeus²." What usually strikes the reader of these files is how the excessive age difference between the spouses can lead to infinite frustration in one of the two and then in both. When divorce is facilitated, as it is today, everything ends as peacefully as possible, with a separation. But when, as in the past, the state, influenced by the different Churches, strives to subjugate people in the throes of an oppressive marriage, the result can turn to tragedy, to crime.



The description of the penalties in use in Canada, usually similar to those of England, can be compared to the punishments inflicted in France: "The penalties³ which are in use in France in the ordinary Courts of Justice are the penalty of *Fire*, the *Wheel*, the *Gallows*, the *Severed Head*, the condemnation to be dragged on a *Rack*, the *Galleys* in time or in perpetuity, the *Banishment* in time or in perpetuity, the *Fist Cut*, the *Cure Cut Cure*⁴, the

¹ •Georges Minois, History of Old Age in the West, from Antiquity to the Renaissance, Librairie Fayard, 1987.

² •Christophe Courau, How we used to treat our Elders, Back on history, October 2003.

³ •New Commentary on the Criminal Ordinance of August 1670, with a Summery of Criminal Justice, by M. le Conseiller au Présidial d'Orléans, chez Debure père, Paris, 1766. p. xxxvi.

⁴ •The *care cut*: interruption of medical treatment.

Tongue Cut or pierced with a hot iron, the Whip, the Wilt⁵, L' Amende Honorable, the Pillory, the Straitjacket, the Seclusion in time or perpetuity in a house of force, the Blame & the Admonition.

In addition to these penalties, there are others in use in the Courts or Conseil de Guerre, which can be called for this reason *military penalties*; as are the *Estrapade*⁶, the condemnation to have the *Head Broken*, that of going through the *Chopsticks*, of being put on a *Wooden Horse*, &c. There are also particular ones for the English Navy; as to give the *Hold*⁷, put to the *Loop*, &c.

The Edict of March 1685 concerning the slaves of America also established specific penalties, such as the Severed Ears⁸, &c.

The *Ecclesiastical Judges* also imposed penalties which were particular to them. They are called *canonical*

⁵ •Marking with red iron by a *fleur-de-lis*, hence the name of the *wilt* (flétrir).

⁶ •The *estrapade* consisted of hoisting the soldier to a certain height and dropping him on the ground.

⁷ •*Give the hold* (Navy). It is a kind of *estrapade* in use among seafarers, to which those of the crew who are convinced of having stolen, blasphemed or fomented some revolt are condemned. There is the ordinary hold and the dry dock: when the ordinary hold is given, the criminal is led to the flat edge, below the great yard (*la grande vergue*), and there, he is made to sit on a stick that is passed between his legs, in order to relieve him; he embraces a rope to which this stick is attached, and which responds to a pulley suspended from one end of the yard. Then 3 or 4 sailors hoist this rope as quickly as they can, until they have guided (raised) the patient to the height of the yard; after which, they suddenly let go of the rope; which throws him into the sea. Sometimes, when the crime is such that it condemns the one we want to punish to a faster fall, we attach a cannonball to his feet. This torture is repeated up to five times, depending on whether the sentence carries it. It is called a dry dock when the criminal is suspended from a shortened rope that descends only a few feet from the surface of the water, prevents him from diving into the sea; it is a kind of *estrapade*. This punishment is made public by a cannon shot that is fired to warn all those of the squadron or the fleet to be the spectators. [Encyclopedia or Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts ou des Métiers, by Diderot...]

⁸ •It was not necessary to damage too much "the working tool" that was the slave.

penalties, such as Excommunication, Degradation of Sacred Orders, Deprivation of Benefits, Prohibition or Suspension of Ecclesiastical Functions, Fasting with Bread and Water, Censorship, &c. But those Tribunals can never sentence to any afflictive or infamous punishment, or even to a fine.

These were the recipes used by the Nobility and the Clergy to "convince", among the Third Estate, the recalcitrant who refused to *submit to the established order by them*. And it is understood that the two Higher Orders were in no way subject to such horrors. In fact, exceptional were the cases of Nobles condemned to something other than Censorship.



As for the remuneration of the executioners, little is known. It was variable according to the times and places. We only know that a double execution in Toronto in 1828 cost more than £92 and £15 for a second execution, probably at a price of... liquidation! Another execution in the same city in 1905 cost \$88.50, or about \$2,200 today not counting the costs of the security service.



Nowadays, most Western countries have repudiated the death penalty to the dustbin of history, not because the Decalogue wants it, but rather because the miscarriage of justice becomes irreparable and therefore irremissible. Only a few of the fifty states of the United States persist; some to defy the common tendency towards the fashion of abolition, and appear uncivil, uncivilized, and "manly"

like Texans. Others more pragmatic because the cost of execution is lower than that of life imprisonment, as this Seattle Times headline indicates. Still others believe that it is better to "kill instantly without causing pain rather than to suffer for 30 years without killing."

Benjamin Franklin himself, a great master of Human Rights, especially those of white Americans since he tolerated slavery, displayed opinions that seem outrageous today: "I have always been of your opinion about the absurdity of the prejudice that makes Europe believe that a family is dishonored by the punishment of one of its own. My opinion is, on the contrary, that a funny man who is hanged and rid of the family, does it more honor than ten rascals who continue to live in its midst." Comment probably thrown to any wind and which has reached durability and immortality in error only because it was engraved in lithographic stone⁹.

One last word. Mental illness commonly known as *narcissistic perversion* plays a particularly notable role in these sad stories. Four of the fourteen death row inmates mentioned in these pages have significant symptoms: Cordélia Viau, Marie Beaulne, Elizabeth-Anne Tilford and Marie-Louise Cloutier. For a perverse-narcissist to love and respect his spouse, the latter must display a strong character and avoid accepting the abuses of the other. The gentle, the shy, the loving people who forgive immediately are the perfect victims of the narcissistic perverts who will

⁹ •Correspondance de Benjamin Franklin, translated from English and annotated by Laboulaye de l'Institut de France et des Sociétés historiques de New-York et de Massachusetts, Librairie Hachette et Cie, Paris, 1866. Volume II (1775 - 1790); p. 425; Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Mr. Le Veillard, written at Philadelphia on April 15, 1787.

make them suffer all their lives without any mercy, without the slightest shame, until their last breath. Narcissistic perverts who can present themselves as true angels of kindness with friends and strangers, behave like demons with those who love them (except their own children). Woe to their spouse, father and mother who will forgive them too quickly for their cruelty and perversity!



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Per il favore del maschio

The Florence Lassandro Murder Case, 1923

The Great War had ended shortly before, but the *Angel of Death*, still unsatisfied, had had the satisfaction of prolonging the killings by the terrible *Spanish Flu* which had more than doubled the slaughter. This pandemic caused 30 million deaths according to the *Institut Pasteur* against 34 million for the *Black Death* of the distant Middle Ages. In Canada, as elsewhere, the Spanish Flu devastated entire villages. Many dead, not buried due to permafrost, were devoured by hungry wolves¹.

Another suffering, another persecution had been brewing for a long time already in North America. Driven by the winds of intolerance blown by the *Teetotallers*² and their *Temperance Leagues*, the idea of officially banning alcohol began to spread in the United States from the 1880s³. In Canada, Wilfrid Laurier's federal government held a referendum in 1898 on the prohibition of alcohol,

¹ •1,408,000 deaths in France for a total population of 39,000,000 inhabitants. The 7.5 million Canadians are expected to have lost 60,000 people in action and almost as many killed by the works of the so-called Spanish flu. In fact, far from being Spanish, it was "Asian" like most flus, but military censorship had banned the disclosure of these news throughout war-torn Europe. Only the newspapers of neutral Spain could talk about its ravages.

² •Teetotallers (or *Total Temperance*) were the fanatical members of these temperance societies at all costs.

³ •It became effective and total in the United States in 1920.

but opposition from the Catholic majority in Quebec made each province decide for itself.

Thus, the English-speaking provinces, generally mirroring the United States in most respects, declared alcohol *Public Ennemi No. 1*. Only Quebec was able to stay away from those intolerant decisions that made alcohol the

Filumena Costanzo, aka Florence Lassandro.



diabolical quintessence of Sin.

The only derogation⁴ from the draconian rule that prohibited the *consumption of alcohol in public*, anywhere in Canada, was a special law allowing the use of alcohol in public for the ritual celebrations of Sunday Mass among Catholics⁵ and Anglicans. In the seventies, a sect (*The Church of Holly Smoke*) even tried to apply for the same privilege with a narcotic "to create an esoteric bond with God", its followers claimed, like the Maya. Their candidacy was rejected.

Across North America, criminal organizations —as well as individuals who were quick-witted to seize fraudulent opportunities— rubbed their hands as they saw in Prohibition a providential manna for "business". If it was Protestant fundamentalists who created this new prohibition, to impose their utopias by force, it was essentially groups of Catholic or Jewish obedience who opposed it and saw this as an opportunity for fraud. On the Quebec-American border, one even saw bars being built, straddling the exact border line. Thus, American customers could enter on their own, drink over the counter that served as an internal border, and leave without attracting the slightest inconvenience from the police, furious at having been fooled.



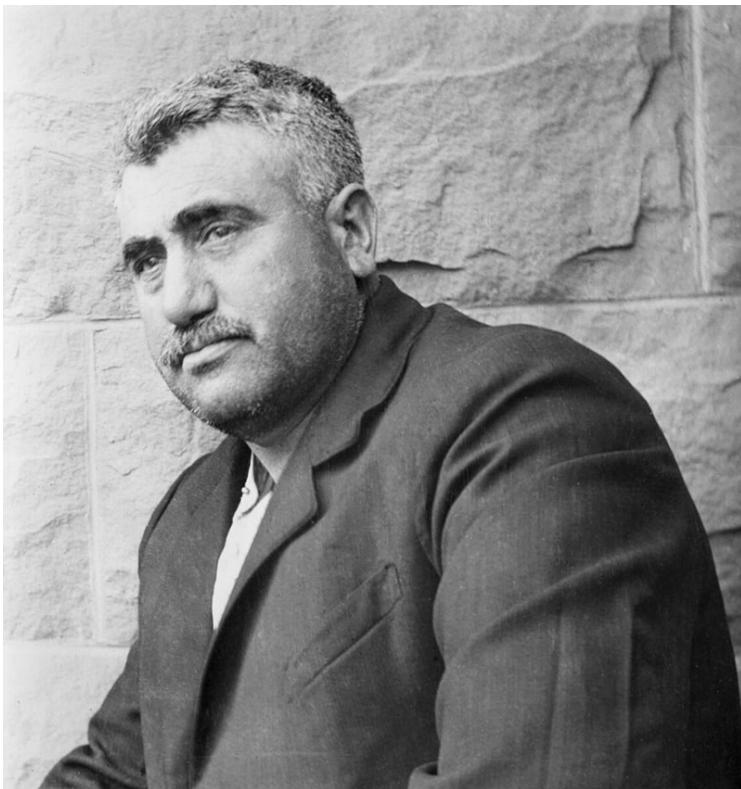
In the newly created province of Alberta, founded just eleven years earlier, Prohibition became law on July 1st, 1916; and in British-Columbia in 1917. The prohibition of alcohol was finally imposed on the Province of Alberta on April 1st, 1918. It was a bad April Fool's Day for many Albertans known until then for their open-

⁴ •Not to mention of course the use of alcohol for medical purposes.

⁵ •Both Catholics attached to Rome and those subject to the English Monarchy (Anglicans, who also consider themselves Catholics).

mindedness... and their gullets always dry and arid. Americans came to stay in southern Alberta for its nightlife, and everyone knew that the \$2 bill—now replaced by metal coins—represented the price of the love heart.

In southern Alberta reigned a certain Emilio Picari-



Bootlegger Emilio Picariello, The Emperor Pic. Priv. Coll.

ello, alias the *King of the Bottle*, aka the *Emperor Pic*. He was a Calabrian by birth, born in 1875, only five years after the total unification of Italy. The greedy aristocratic

class of this monarchical Italy⁶ and the different mafias⁷ owned the land and of course refused agricultural reform for the benefit of the Italian people. These two social groups of fierce selfishness exploited the Italian people with remarkable cynicism, brutality, and indifference to the suffering of the people.

Picariello had landed in Toronto about 1900 as an economic refugee⁸. In 1911 he moved to Fernie⁹ with seven children. At the opening of the First World War, he had already taken on the appearance of a prosperous businessman, with his 90 kilos and hard work. It is remarkable how minorities, oppressed in their country of origin (the Irish, the Scots, the Italians, etc.), flourished very quickly when transplanted into a free country that did not artificially keep them in a state of social disgrace.

Pic's career began in a macaroni factory. He quickly fraternized with another Italian from Fernie, P. Carosella, who ran the city's liquor store, and he realized that this alcoholic artificial paradise represented a potential future as lucrative as drugs in the twenty-first century. He then threw himself into the sale of alcohol to the population as if he were on a crusade against foolishness.

Picariello had the genius to give his criminal activity the appearance of a political struggle against the intolerance of a government in place; as did the gangster Jacques

⁶ •This Monarchy will fall in 1946 to be replaced by the Republic. The Italian writer-historian Edmondo de Amicis, a great admirer of Émile Zola, described this misery of Italian emigration in his famous book: *Sull'oceano*, translated into French under the title: *Sur l'océan*; emigrants and signori from Genoa to Montevideo. Editions Payot & Rivages. Paris, 2004.

⁷ •*Cosa Nostra* in Sicily, *Camorra* in the province of Naples (Campania), *Ndrangheta* in Calabria, *Stidda* in Western Sicily, la *Sacra Corona Unita* in Puglia...

⁸ •The expression did not yet exist.

⁹ •Canadian Rocky Mountain Town.

Mesrine fifty years later. This traffic quickly became a more than fruitful activity that made many followers, without requiring the slightest proselytism. Fortune was at the rendezvous for these miserable immigrants from Calabria, so despised, in Italy itself, by the Padanians of the Po Peninsula.

Of the 15,000,000 poor Italian emigrants who went into exile outside Italy between 1880 and 1914 (50% of the country's population in 1900), the craftsmen and the most educated¹⁰ went to populate Argentina and Brazil, while the most miserable (those of southern Italy) headed for the United States and Canada. Having become a very wealthy man, Picariello was soon considered, among the thousands of smugglers who trafficked in the wee hours, as the most powerful one, south of Alberta and even of all the Canadian Prairies.

Stimulated by his fear of poverty and by his desire to demonstrate to his original Calabrian village that he had succeeded prodigiously, even better than the Italian aristocracy, owner of the Italic Boot, Picariello quickly became not only manager of the *Macaroni Factory* but the only representative in the West of the *Pollock Wine Company*, organ of the American Jewish mafia. As a result, he could import, transport, sell and buy alcohol in spite of the police, frustrated that the Law only protected criminals who managed to control local politicians by corruption. Always looking for new outlets, he also founded a small manufacture of cigars, and later ice cream.

Picariello even invented *recycling* before its time, because he instituted the collection of empty bottles in the city, as did at the same time many Jewish immigrants who,

¹⁰ •From Northern Italy and the Po Plain. Such a human hemorrhage took place because the Mafia and the Aristocracy refused land reform, i.e., the sharing of arable land, out of selfishness.

through their incessant work, became millionaires during the first part of the twentieth century (Steinberg, Pollack, Greenberg...) One can affirm without a shadow of a doubt that if the events we recount had not led Emperor Pic to his misfortune, he would probably have become as rich as Dame Ida Steinberg of Quebec who had begun his career by recycling Quebecers' old rags and empty bottles in an old child stroller¹¹.

Fortune smiles even more on the hard-working people than on the daring. Picariello accumulated a colossal fortune, as do today's drug traffickers and yesterday the *British East India Company* which had imposed the opium trade between India Bengal and the China Middle Kingdom. In 1918, he purchased the Alberta Hotel in Blaimore and then a seat on Blaimore City Council. His six Buick McLaughlin¹², which allowed him to peddle his alcohol, were for this reason called the Whisky-Sixes. Infatuation easily rises to the head of the "*Nouveaux Riches*", who are "*Old Poors*" and who, therefore, are proud of the path traveled and this social ascent that they attribute only to their own intelligence; while enrichment also implies less confessable defects: selfishness, rapacity, economic vampirism...

For what was his social status, Emperor Pic gradually came to believe himself as invulnerable in the West as Al Capone later became in the East. He was all the more *Emilio Picariello, with his wife Maria and three of his six children. Priv. Coll.*

untouchable because —playing on all keyboards— he informed the *Royal Canadian Mounted Police* about rival

¹¹ •Born in Quebec, Steinberg chain stores covered all of Eastern Canada and sold everything: food, clothing, medicines. Inheritance disputes caused the bankruptcy and disappearance of the multiple companies founded by Ida Steinberg at the end of the twentieth century. Ida was a Hungarian Jew.

¹² •Which looked like Ford Model T.

gangs. Since Canadian police officers usually behaved less corruptibly and venally than their American colleagues, Pic had to play cat and mouse with the APP, the *Alberta Provincial Police*, and the North-West Mounted Police. Over time, this high-flying gangster would probably have



become as famous as his compatriot from Chicago, who was just beginning his career as a criminal¹³.

Facing Emperor Pic, Sergeant James Scott of the Alberta Provincial Police played the role that the future Eliot

¹³ •Capone was of Italian origin, but born in New York.

Ness, "the incorruptible", will play in front of Capone. Scott's biggest dream was to arrest Pic, but for that he had to take him red handed, with a load of alcohol in his cars because the laws of Anglo-Saxon countries —influenced behind the scenes by merchant lobbies— protect mainly the rogues under the pretext of safeguarding individual rights. Pic's lawyers, who knew how to play the Law with just as much genius as Antonio Stradivarius played music on his famous violin, always found the procedural error to get out of trouble.

As soon as Italy decided to embark on the First World War alongside France¹⁴, Russia and Britain, Picariello took \$50,000 worth of War Bonds and founded a charity to distribute, for example, Christmas baskets. It was a very commendable action, although less perilous for him than to volunteer to defend the Italian Frioul against the Germans, and suffering the impetuous storms of the Austrian Imperial Army in the Upper-Adige trenches. It is true that Italy was not yet fighting for ideological but territorial motivations.



The second anti-hero of this tragedy that some have presented as cornelian¹⁵ was a woman, Florence Lasandro. Born in the last year of the nineteenth century (1900), in *Cosenza-di-Calabria*, in the land of Bel Canto and Ndrangheta, under the exotic name of Filumena

¹⁴ • In April 1915, after long negotiations with the French on one side and the Germans on the other, the Italian Government chose to fight with those who granted this country the most material advantages, except that 1,240,000 Italians died as a result of this haggling of diplomats-traders, and another million remained disabled. Politicians who declare wars for no good reason should be subject to fighting on the front lines.

¹⁵ • In a sense, the situation was cornelian since Florence's passion was opposed to honor.

Constazo, she followed her family to Fernie in southern Alberta, where she grew up in age, but much less in wisdom. Filumena took in Canada the more familiar name of Florence.

On October 16th, 1915, at the tender age of 15, she married another Italian immigrant named Carlo Sanfidele, who took in Canada the name of Charles Lassandro. All these anthroponomic changes were very useful for the *integration* of immigrants into the national community. Lassandro became the personal mechanic of Emperor Pic. According to rumors, a rather strong emotional bond was quickly established between the young Filumena-Florence and the old boss Picariello. He poached love and picked the *flowers of evil* within his cultural community and criminal organization. It was just a *Right of Cuissage*¹⁶.

Fernie was then just a group of bad wood-fronted cabins and stores along the new transcontinental line of the *Canadian Pacific Railway* that had just crossed the Crow's Nest Pass into Canada's Pacific Province: British Columbia. The latter province had been created in 1871 to prevent the multitude of American gold-rushers from asking for New Caledonia to join the United States¹⁷. The adjective "British" unambiguously indicated to the Americans that they were entering a territory then belonging to England.



¹⁶ Le *Droit de Cuissage* was the lord's feudal privilege over his vassals' wifes (real or legendary).

¹⁷ •As it had taken place in Texas and in the other states of the American Southwest that the United States had peacefully invaded and then wrested using the subterfuge of pseudo democracy. Similarly, the Russians wrested Crimea from Ukraine in March 2014. When there were enough settlers, they asked for independence. The mainland of present-day British-Columbia was called New Caledonia. The current island of New Caledonia had been named 50 years earlier by the Scottish navigator James Cook (Caledonia is the Roman name of Scotland).

When, on April 1st, 1918, Prohibition was imposed on Alberta, Picariello saw an exceptional opportunity to do business. This Calabrian was going to find in America a fertile ground for hatching his genius, in Good as in Evil. Thus, Prohibition would lead the Picariello family —like the Kennedys in Boston, the Capones in Chicago, or Meyer Lansky¹⁸ everywhere else— to accumulate a huge fortune, a springboard for many political careers designed to bring respectability to these families and gild their brand new image.

For the transport of smuggled whisky, Picariello equipped his cars with bumpers made of metal pipes filled with cement, so that he could push back into the ditch, as with a ram, any lighter car. In late 1918, he even replaced his Ford Model T with McLaughlin-Sixes, which became the gangsters' "Citroëns." These were then the most powerful cars on the market. Citroën further improved these qualities by adding the front-wheel-drive, from 1934.

Eager to play cat and mouse with the police and disappear like the magician Robert-Houdin¹⁹, Pic secretly dug a vast underground warehouse under his hotel which served as his Headquarters. He created a reale mousetrap of tunnels which, in the event of a prolonged siege, gave access to escape or clandestine supplies, and made it possible to vanish like a magician into the lush nature of the Rocky Mountains. The entrance to the secret warehouse

¹⁸ •After World War II, Lansky, hunted down by the FBI, took refuge in Israel to benefit from the *Law of Return*. But under American financial pressure (because Israel is the country that receives the most military aid from the United States), he was one of only three Jews to whom Israel refused to benefit from the Law of Return, which also gives refuge and asylum to thugs.

¹⁹ •Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin (1805-1871) was the father of modern magic. The Hungarian Erik Weisz borrowed his name, and thus part of his fame, to create his character of Harry Houdini.

was camouflaged and retracted by bag fabric, and in front of this curtain were piled up barrels full of empty bottles whose tinkling gave the alarm in case of an unannounced police break-in. To hide the noise that could come from the subsoil, the pianist of the hotel was ordered to play very loudly and noisily all the pieces of the *forte*, *fortissimo* and even *fortississimo* repertoire: Arnold's *Gigue*, some Brahms' *waltzes*, Jean-Henri d'Anglebert's French *Minuet*....

Emperor Pic loaded his cars with a wall of flour bags behind which the precious whiskey was piled up. The car or truck could access the secret room, and the flour was distributed free of charge to Italian families in need who appreciated it to the highest degree in these leaner times or in starvation periods. Thus, like the Medellin Cartel which invested in the social, Pic could play the *Robin Hood* who, supposedly, stole the rich Franco-Norman nobility and the French Colonial Administration to give to the poor Saxons of England.

Everyone knew in the still half-wild Western frontier that Pic, so beloved by the Italian community of the Rocky Mountains, engaged in alcohol trafficking with impunity and followed mule tracks through the Crow's Nest region towards the U.S. border with Montana, an area that smugglers called *The Whiskey Pass*²⁰.

One day, bogged down in the mud of a terrible storm, Pic came across two policemen on horseback who, to get him out of the rut, used their horses to pull his car full of smuggled whiskey. The gangster told the anecdote to anyone who wanted to hear it by mocking the overly helpful policemen.

²⁰ •Whisky Gap can also be seen as the Whisky-Hole or the Whisky-Door.

But when you arm yourself to the teeth to play *cat and mouse* with the Mounted Police and Justice, you end up causing a blunder; and when this misstep is the murder of a policeman, you risk the rope. This error occurred on September 21st 1922, at a time when Canadian judges "had an easy rope." They hanged an average of 7 people per year²¹.

While these events were taking place in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, at the same time in Europe the Italian Fascists led by Benito Mussolini marched on Rome to seize power. As reported in the *Minutes* of the Court of Assizes procedure—deposited at the Ottawa National Archives—let's follow the course of this terrible murder case.



It all started in the middle of the Rocky Mountains, in the mining village of Frank (Alberta), very close to the Crow's Nest Pass. The interprovincial boundary was none other than the watershed between the Pacific and Atlantic Watersheds²². Constable Stephen (or Steve) Lawson from Coleman²³ had warned Sergeant James O. Scott from Frank's station that *the smugglers of the Picariello gang were about to leave for Blackmore with a load of whiskey*.

Sergeant Scott quickly went there with Constable Day. They stood in the middle of Coleman's Main Street, just in front of the Alberta Hotel, glaring at the owner

²¹ •While the Justice of New France sent an average of 0.77 people to the gallows each year.

²² •The Hudson Bay Watershed is part of the Atlantic Watershed. The interprovincial border is between Alberta and British Columbia.

²³ •1.7 km west of Coleman between Coleman and Frank. Lawson is the surname Lau-son anglicized.

Emilio Picariello who, too, stood with his arms crossed with ostentation just ahead of one of his McLaughlin cars built in Canada²⁴. Emperor Pic stared at the despised ones Scott and Day with a contemptuous and even sardonic smile, as if to tell them: "You will see what trick I would play you, poor underpaid scoundrels!" Nothing is worse than the formerly-poor rich man to despise and contempt those who remain poor all their lives out of honesty. That is their consolation.

Suddenly, Picariello, without taking his eyes off the policemen, reached out to his car and sounded the warning horn. At this signal, came at full throttle, from behind the hotel, another McLaughlin, hood raised. In its haste, the car missed by a hair's breadth the two policemen who were standing in their path. It was overloaded to the top of whiskey cases, and her driver was none other than Stefano (Steve), Pic's eldest son barely out of adolescence (20 years old)²⁵.

Seeing that the police car was about to launch in pursuit of Stefano, Emperor Pic jumped behind the wheel of his own car and started in a cloud of dust opal-grey, because, at the time, this narrow, uneven and unpaved road was not yet the beautiful Crow's Nest Road, which today runs like a ribbon of satin grey-alpaca along the Pacific-Canadian railway line, parallel to The Rivière-à-l'Élan²⁶. By intervening with vivacity and determination between his son and the police, Picariello was clearly trying to prevent the police from catching up with Stefano, thus

²⁴ •The McLaughlin brand will later be absorbed by Buick. McLaughlin was the founder of General Motors of Canada.

²⁵ •Emilio Picariello and his wife Marianino Marucci had seven children: Steve (Stefano), Julie (Angelina), Carmine, Louis (Luigi), Chuck (Charles), Albert, and finally Helen (Florence Eleanor).

²⁶ •Elk River, today.

depriving them of the satisfaction of proceeding with his arrest "*in flagrante delicto*".

The cars fizzled in an infernal noise and the frightened birds took refuge in the majestic green of the trees that touched the blue sky, and which greeted the automobiles with a few swings of their foliage. Suddenly the adventurous Sergeant Scott, in a daring swerve that almost ended with a deadly head-to-tail, managed to squeeze, at the risk of his life, on the gray-anthracite side of the road. He passed Picariello who tried unsuccessfully to prevent him from doing so by trapping him against the ditch.

In several swerves, the police car missed a hair and ended its crazy race in the ditch, then against the century-old trees, straight as ship masts, which hailed it with their toupet of greenery. Stefano, reckless to the death, drove decidedly too fast to be caught by the police. Also, faced with the desperate inefficiency of the pursuit, Scott decided to make a short stop in front of the Greenhill Hotel so that Constable Day could go on a phone call to Coleman's station.

Stefano, for his part, continued his unbridled and noisy race, at a dizzying speed for the time and for the poor quality of this dirt road. The wheels raised clouds of opal dust that the Chinook of the Rockies scooped and swept up in an instant towards the azure blue sky. The two policemen then resumed the pursuit at moderate speed. The three cars were approaching the interprovincial border of nearby British Columbia. Scott then thought it was no longer necessary for him to extend this infernal pursuit, knowing that Constable Lawson²⁷ would try to apprehend the young smuggler in Coleman by installing a dam-

²⁷ •The Anglo-Canadian rank *constable* comes from the medieval French grade *constable* then *constable* (count of stables).

chicane of planks across the road. As soon as Pic noticed that the police were giving up the pursuit, he also slowed down.

In Coleman, Constable Lawson received the telephone message from his colleague Day and immediately went into action. He erected his barrier across the road and stood in front of it, in the middle of the road, to intercept the bandit's car. But the example being the best criterion of education, the young Stefano was not a man to be less "irreducible" than his father. Inebriated by his desperate escape, by the speed, by the infernal noise of the engine, and by the high feeling of being the Dauphin of Emperor Pic, he refused to comply. Then police officer Lawson shot him twice in the arm without convincing him to stop.

Furious, Steve Lawson and Houghton immediately requisitioned a civilian vehicle in the village of Coleman, and in turn, went after the young thug. Having approached the fugitive, they even fired a third warning shot which did not lead, no more than the first two projectiles, the young bandit to immobilize his vehicle to submit to the harsh requirements of the Law. It was against his honor as a macho gangster, who absolutely had to behave as "heroically" as his father, if he wanted to win a place of leader in the evil and harmful Picariello dynasty!

But Nature itself hindered the Law. The pebbles and potholes that constellated the great dirt road, got the better of the tires and rims of the two policemen. Consequently, this handicap put an end to their stubbornness. They eventually interrupted the pursuit and slowly returned to Coleman with a flat tire in order to return to the furious owner the damaged car, thanking him for his civic spirit.

On his return to the village, Emperor Pic, who had come back earlier, allowed himself to taunt them ironically:

—*Huh! You didn't manage to sting the load!*

—*It's far from over, believe me! Your son will be prosecuted for violating the Motor Vehicles Act.*

Without any sample of the alcohol transported by the young gangster, there was no question of prosecuting him for transporting illegal beverages. There were only a few modest offences left in the Mounted Police arsenal for dangerous misconduct, refusal to comply and speeding. Crumbs!

—*Anyway, I saved my load!* Pic replied, sneering. *And I don't give a damn about pushing you to the ditch. Lawson is very lucky not to have killed my son. I would have killed him with my hands!*

Thus, it was obvious that a telephone call had already spread the news that shots had been fired and that a ricochet had slightly wounded the young bandit. As can be seen from reading these lines: some immigrants in 1922 did not choose the path of legality any more than those of today. But, while the law is now extremely permissive with criminals and even terrorists²⁸, at the beginning of the twentieth century, these immigrants needed much more courage or unconsciousness, because in case of crime, they ended up at the end of a rope.

Following this event of September 21st, 1922, the Mounted Police was going to decree what today we call *Tolerance O.*

²⁸ •For example, the non-incarceration for many offenses, the reduction of sentences for good conduct, the provisional release for rehabilitation to freedom in the modern world...



It was on the evening of this very turbulent day that another event happened —capital oh! So much! since it ended up in two death sentences. As the evening dozed off on the shoulder of the night, the complacent moon put the day in watch light to allow humans to take some rest. But the devil himself would take advantage of the serene calm of the evening to inspire a crime. His day of service completed, after this long and very trying pursuit after the son of Emperor Pic, Constable Stephen Lawson returned home, kissed his wife and daughter Pearl, barely 9 years old, and hung his uniform jacket and his service weapons on a nail. Suddenly, Pearl called him:

—Dad, there's a car outside. Someone is probably coming to see you.

Unarmed, Lawson went out into the courtyard. Fire-bursts broke out immediately, coming from two silhouettes packed into a McLaughlin. The policeman quickly turned around to take refuge in his home and retrieve his weapon. But the shouting continued angrily, and Lawson was unable to take cover. He fell face down, dead. The powerful black car started in a long screech of tires, only to disappear as quickly as possible like a fugitive ghost in a cloud of dust.

Sergeant Scott was immediately alerted by Steve Lawson's wife. The policeman questioned the young Pearl who had seen the action. She recounted what she saw: "A lady, in the car, had fired shots at her dad. She was wearing an amaranth beret." Scott immediately went to the bandit's hotel where he proceeded to arrest Lassandro, Emperor

Pic's mechanic²⁹. After which, eager to gather as much evidence as possible, he scoured the city for a long time to locate the McLaughlin, totally untraceable! The gangster had disappeared like a nightmarish mirage.

On his return from this almost unsuccessful quest, a phone call informed him that, as expected, the young Stefano Picariello had just been arrested and incarcerated while trying to force the beam-chicane just after crossing the border of the province of British Columbia. He was carrying his large load of whiskey. The shipment of liquor and the McLaughlin were immediately confiscated and legally seized. One of the projectiles fired by police officer Lawson during the pursuit had hit Stefano in the right hand, without gravity. Everything was explained! Lawson's murder was in fact just an act of retaliation by the gangsters for the news of this injury and arrest.

But who was this "pistolera"? this pistol-toting female killer with a red-amaranth beret? Picariello is in total control over his nerves and moods to murder a policeman. He knew very well that, in Canadian culture, the life of a police officer is sacrosanct, because those in England were once never armed. And even if the Canadian gendarmes were armed, it was still customary to respect them; everywhere in Canada, except in Quebec, where Quebecers, naturally unruly and rebellious, considered them with much more disrespect.

As a good mafioso, Pic preferred to use, with the police, corruption rather than firearms. He was far too smart to get himself into such trouble. Everyone, including the Italians, was even very surprised that he could find it daring and reckless to retort to a police officer: "*Lawson was*

²⁹ Filumena-Florence's husband.

very lucky not to kill my son... I would have killed him with my hands!" Was it possible that the powerful aroma of his money began to intoxicate him and disturb his discernment? This pseudo "wisdom" with the police had often pushed him to lack "righteousness" with other gangsters.

Emperor Pic ate at all the racks. As noted above, he had even served as an informant for the *Alberta Provincial Police* a few years earlier to sabotage the business of a rival gang that competed with him. He had not hesitated to push the infamy to the point of transporting police constables in his powerful smuggled cars to help law enforcement destroy another rival gang. All things considered, the police had probably shown too much tolerance towards him... *for services rendered*. The leniency of the Law is harmful with spoiled children and even with gangsters!

After such a crime, the collaboration and benevolent complicity were definitively broken between Picariello and the police. The Rubicon was crossed. The *British Columbia Provincial Police* and the *Alberta Provincial Police* immediately worked in support of the horsemen and vehicles to put an end to the criminal careers of these thugs. The Federal Mounted Police (Gendarmerie) joined them. The killers were going to pay dearly for his or her crime, and no later than the same day. This proves once again that crime develops only in a favorable soil; when the authorities tolerate it out of softness or venality.

A mousetrap was surreptitiously stretched by Sergeant Scott and Constable Moriarty around the smugglers' refuge, the famous landmark hotel, as riddled with tunnels and secret chambers as an Emmental cheese³⁰. Around 3:00 a.m., at a time when the mouse thinks that the cat is

³⁰ •Also named French Gruyère. Swiss Gruyère has no holes, contrary to popular opinion.

sleeping soundly, the purr of a McLaughlin announced that the bandits were finally returning to their holes in the hotel shop.

—**STOP!** Scott screamed, angrily waving a lamp with his left hand and a gun with his right.

The large vehicle came to a stop. The lantern illuminated the frightened face of Alberto Dorenzo, a taxi driver from the region. It was the car of the crime.

—*Get out of that car! Where did you find it?* shouted the sergeant.

—*Near a hut after the Cosmopolitan Hotel³¹ in Blaimore. I thought I had to take it back to its owner.*

Scott examined the car by the light of his lamp. A bullet had split the windshield, another had broken the speedometer before ricocheting off the engine block to go into the floor. On the front seat rested an unexploded cartridge of .32 caliber automatic. He noticed on the floor a button of green fabric. Most of these observations were made at daybreak.

As soon as the sun had returned, like a brilliant painter, its colors to the landscape, Alberto Dorenzo had to lead the policemen to the place where he had found the bandit's vehicle. The car had been hidden in an undergrowth at the bottom of a talweg. In the dense foam, Scott found the very clean trace of a high-heeled shoe. The young Pearl had therefore not been mistaken; it was indeed a woman who had done the assault. Scott then went to the scene of the crime and found 4 Dominion .32 caliber casings, similar to the one found in the car. It was now necessary to find the killers.

³¹ •This hotel still exists; on the Twentieth Avenue.

With the reinforcement of other police constables, a systematic manhunt was organized to rake the area of the *coulee* in which the car had been hidden. At the end of the evening, in the middle of the mountains, the haggard and frightened face of Emperor Pic finally appeared, as lamentable as the head of Saddam Hussein captured by the Americans 80 years later.

—*I surrender*, he implored.

All arrogance had disappeared from his attitude. He knew that a policeman had been murdered and that now his criminal career was over, as well as... his earthly stay. Presumably!

—***Hands up!*** Screamed, mad with rage, Bradner of the Provincial Police.

Emperor Pic let himself be disarmed without the slightest resistance and asked in a gentle tone:

—*Tell me the truth, my son Stefano... He died?*

—*He was lightly hit in the hand*, barked the policeman.

The smuggler's face seemed to reflect the relief; or perhaps it was just the spectrum of the rope that plunged him into apprehension and anguish. He ventured to ask in a low voice:

—*What about the police officer Lawson?*

—***He's dead!*** Bradner roared.

The world fell apart for the smuggler. The time of fame and fortune was definitively over. He received the blow with a big wrinkle that instantly ploughed his forehead. Chained like a convict, he was taken under guard to the prison in Lethbridge, Alberta. On the way, he cowardly revealed that the mysterious woman with the red-amaranth beret was none other than Filumena Constazo alias

Florence Lassandro, the wife of his mechanic. She was only 22 years old. And, according to her husband arrested shortly before, she was probably hiding at *La Ferme Dubois*. She frequented the lady.

The police immediately went to *La Ferme Dubois* where they were greeted by a young woman with long hair. She was lying on a sofa à la Récamier. Florence pulled a long cigarette from her lips to invite the policeman to sit down. She had not yet realized that her Emperor Pic, her lover, had fallen from his imperial pedestal:

—*I guess you know why we are here!* says Scott.

—*I have no idea,* replied unflappably Filumena-Florence, opening large eyes full of astonishment.

—*It is about the murder of Constable Lawson,* replied Scott. *Don't be afraid!*

—*He's dead and I'm alive,* she exclaimed with a crystalline laugh where the mockery pierced. *I really don't have a reason to be afraid?*

—*Is that right, yes! That's what we're going to see! Take your stuff. You come with me!*

She went to the room and came back with a green coat, a button of which was missing, and... a red amaranth beret. By this gesture, she signed her death warrant. Scott pulled the green cloth button out of his pocket and compared it to the coat. It was the same fabric.

—*Where did you find it? I thought I had lost it!* she said, laughing with pleasure.

—*You had lost it!* Scott said. *You had lost it... in the car with which the murderers killed Lawson!*

She took the blow with a kind of indifference, a kind of apparent coldness. But the underlying fear pierced the surface of phlegm when she cried out, defensively:

—*Sergeant, you've been harassing us for years! Don't tell me you want to put the blame on me for this!*

Did she want to shift her responsibilities to the police? Scott found her automatic pistol loaded with 32-gauge cartridges at the home of Madame Gibeau, another French-speaking friend of Filumena-Florence, on another nearby farm.



Police officer Lawson. Priv. Coll.



The trials of Filumena-Florence Lasandro and Emperor Pic were scheduled for November 27th, 1922, at the Calgary Courthouse. Great was the exaltation throughout the West when it was learned that the two smugglers were going to be

tried for the murder of the constable Lawson.

—*These cursed immigrant papists; it's really scum! I bet you that these mobsters will still get away with buying the police and the judges!* raged the others.

On November 27th, the Calgary Courthouse was full of curious people. In the defendants' box, Pic looked modestly at the floor. Florence, probably too confident in the power of her boss and lover's money, entered the Palace of

Justice, all dressed-up in the manner of Fanny Milgleys, the new Hollywood starlet who had just shot *The Young Rajah* with Rudolph Valentino. She waved a friendly gesture to her friends packed into tight rows —less tight than usual, though—and said to them with a frivolous voice:

—*Don't worry, my friends. I'll soon be among you!*

The debates began without delay. It was learned from Florence's first interrogation that Picariello had received a phone call telling him that his son had been shot by a Lawson bullet. What did this word "shot" mean? Killed or wounded? Convinced that his son was dead and possessed by a kind of desperate madness and by a remnant of claim to be *above the law*, he had jumped behind the wheel of his car, to find Lawson at Coleman's post and carry out his promise.

The young woman who never left him, neither by day nor by night, sat at his side, as furious as her master, by social mimicry and by romantic allegiance.

—*Where is my son?* Picariello had screamed.

—*I don't know!* Lawson replied.

—*You'll come with me to find him!* threatened Emperor Pic, drunk with rage. And seeing that the unarmed policeman seemed unwilling to obey her emperor and master. Florence began to shoot him. She may not have noticed that he had left his handgun in his house, because, during the Coroner's Inquest, she lied by invoking two shots fired by the victim himself:

—*That's when I heard two detonations*, Florence invented in her own statement. *One of the bullets scratched my leg and the other hit the windshield. Pic and Lawson were fighting. I got scared and fired a bunch of cartridges in the air but I wasn't the one who shot Lawson!*

She was just coming out of adolescence and thought she would be getting away with simply denying the facts, like a schoolgirl caught red-handed.

During the Assize trial that followed, police officer Scott took the stand to show that all this was just a figment of her creative imagination. According to the trajectories, all shots came from the inside of the car. He added that the projectiles found, came from the pistol of Florence. Pic hadn't fired!

A witness, T.F. Brown of Blaimore, stated that he had heard Picariello swear that he would kill, without hesitation and without the slightest state of mind, any policeman who killed his son. He still believed himself in the mountain valleys of Calabria where everything was regulated in the old fashion: by violence. Then, after expressing these horrors, Emperor Pic had embraced his weapon as if to give thanks to the "*Avenger, Guarantor of the Honor of the Family by the vendetta.*"

Picariello should have turned his tongue seven times in his mouth before uttering these boasts that would lead him straight to the gallows, when it was not he who had killed the policeman. But perhaps the gangster had suggested to his mistress to punish the policeman herself so that he himself would not risk this terrible consequence! Little Pearl Lawson, who had sadly witnessed the murder of her dear father, came to testify before the jury of six people to designate the murderer:

—*It was this lady who shot my dad!* the nine-year-old said, pointing her fragile little index finger in Florence's direction.

Directly incriminated, the latter frowned and shook her head as a denial. It was then that Sergeant Scott presented the red-amaranth beret of the scoundrel, found in

his room. The young woman remained frozen. In spite of all this evidence of guilt that was dangerously accumulating on his young head of curly bichon, the energetic Florence quickly recovered. She relied with all her strength on the precedent that women had not been executed for twenty-five years in this region. This has built up her morale of steel, to the point where she even came to risk some jokes with the guards about the implausibility of her execution.

In fact, she became so confident, that she imagined—perhaps at the instigation of the dethroned Emperor Pic—that if she took entirely the crime on her own head, no one would be executed; she, because she is a woman, and he because he was obviously not the killer according to the testimony of little Pearl herself. Totally exonerated—or at least insufficiently incriminated to deserve the death sentence—Picariello would be released after some administrative procrastination, and he could thus devote his immense wealth to corrupting magistrates, lawyers, politicians, all those who were *for sale* within the Alberta social hierarchy, *everyone*, because the young woman already knew that everyone has a price.

Thanks to this corruption, as widespread as in Southern Italy, Picariello would free his girlfriend so devoted, by manipulating the Law or otherwise. Did she make this gift of herself out of a spirit of sacrifice, by calculation or... by love, since it was widely known that she granted to the Emperor Pic outrageous privileges on her own libido, according to the tradition solidly established among the godfathers of the mafias, among the rich and famous who obtain such favors and gratifications without even begging for them?

No one knew the truth with total certainty! But nothing is absolutely guaranteed in this imperfect world. The young woman finally confessed to having been behind the gun that had killed the constable Stephen Lawson, but she sought to water down her responsibility. This apparent crime was only a regrettable accident. Admittedly, her husband's boss was driving the vehicle inadvertently, but—in accordance with an unwritten plot—she assured that he had nothing to do with it! Absolutely nothing! He was there, yes, but... by coincidence! He was totally unaware that she was going to shoot in the direction of the policeman... to frighten him, only! So, she took everything on her own head, her own responsibility, and committed the capital imprudence to sign her confession.

This crime unleashed a tsunami of exasperation and anti-Italian rage throughout Western Canada. The Italians were not the only ones to pass in the bashing of racism. Before them, there had been the Germans, the Chinese, the East Indians, not to mention the Amerindians and the Métis—together with the Jews who had been fully fulfilling their role with perseverance since the world was a world. Then it was the Japanese³². It was a gangrenous and unhealthy time when the most perverse racism colored the attitudes of many Albertans with an immigrant background themselves.

Throughout the centuries and in all civilizations, the last wave of immigrants has always polarized the attacks of the people in place and the immigrants already arrived,

³² •The Germans at the time of the World Wars, the Japanese at the time of the Pacific War, the Chinese at the beginning of the century (they were forced to pay a special tax, and were banned from immigration to Canada by a law of 1923). The East Indians at the turn of the century, although they were "British": an immigrant ship remained stranded for long months at anchor, off Vancouver, subject to a refusal to disembark by the Government. They were the first boat peoples. As for the Canadian handicapped, they were sterilized by the authorities of British Columbia and Alberta.

very happy to dismiss away from themselves the wickedness and human stupidity. This phenomenon of ostracism was not concentrated in Alberta. The year 1920 saw the eruption into Canadian territory of a nauseating leprosy, the Ku Klux Klan. While France mourned its millions killed in the Great War, Canada covered itself with a swarm of unhealthy KKK cells, ready to do anything to "crush the infamous papist." It was in the English newspaper MONTRÉAL DAILY STAR that the American Klan unveiled its Canadian "program": "Although we are anti-Jews and anti-Negroes, our interventions will not be limited to these sects or colors."

Beginning in 1924, the Klan crosses began to illuminate with their infernal flames the nights of the Canadian Maritime Provinces, then the entire West, in order to frighten or kill all that was Papist and Francophone³³. The *British Test Act* had been abolished in the nineteenth century, but its perversion remained in people's minds because the Klan Superman was represented by a White Knight brandishing the Union Jack, just as the White Teutonic Knight in Nazi sauce wore the swastika. Both shamelessly displayed the Christian cross of St. George, except that one was red and the other black. Where was hiding the non-violence of Jesus of Nazareth³⁴?

Moreover, in this Florence trial, the Scottish defense attorney, John McKinley Cameron, urged the jurors at length to disregard the xenophobia in the difficult deliberations they had to carry out in order not to violate Lady

³³ •In 1922, the Klan burned the Collège de Saint-Boniface in Manitoba because it was Francophone and Catholic. A dozen students were burned alive. It was in Alberta (in 1928) and British Columbia (in 1933) that the Sexual Sterilization Act sterilized the disabled and the mentally ill. Hitler only had to take a model.

³⁴ •Non-violence that transpired from his famous sentence: "If you are hit on one cheek, stretch out the other!"

Justice. La crowd was trampling impatiently and roaring in front of the Calgary Courthouse. They were in the grip of such overexcitement, such verbal and even physical violence, that an acquittal would certainly have sparked a bloody riot. Fortunately for the police officers in charge of maintaining order, very worried because they feared having to contain or quell the popular fury, a rumor suddenly ran that the two verdicts had fallen.

The two defendants were found guilty. The rumor was soon proven, and the agitation did not degenerate. Filumena-Florence's heroic (or daring) tactic had been unsuccessful. She had played her own existence in Russian roulette to save her lover's, and she had lost everything. Then, Judge Walsh unsurprisingly sentenced the co-defendants to die by hanging to pay their debt to Justice, according to the very archaic *Biblical Law of Talion, An Eye for an Eye, a Tooth for a Tooth, Death for Death*³⁵. Both would be executed on February 21st, 1923, at Fort Saskatchewan Penitentiary, 20 km northeast of Edmonton.

When the sentence was announced, Florence suddenly fainted and collapsed to the ground, while Emperor Pic, with trembling legs, was brought back to his cell.



The evil time was fleeing like the winter wind. The time that lingers and strolls with delight in moments of misfortune and sufferings, hastens to pass through times of happiness. This brought us to a week of double execution. A judge confirmed the date. Fortunately, Filumena-

³⁵ •The Jewish law of talion (from the Latin *talis*: tel, similar) allowed revenge provided it was equivalent. Today, the law of retaliation (or self-defense) leads to an equal response only to safeguard the safety of the victim. Revenge is forbidden after the fact. The Islamic Sharia for its part grants the victim's family an alternative triple: 1-for-giveness. 2-the application of the *Law of Talion*. 3-financial compensation. Whoever chooses one must give up the others.

Florence was persuaded that a miracle would happen at the last second in order to save *God's Beloved*³⁶. However, she looked with apprehension at the last grains of sand of the *Great Hourglass of her Existence* which flowed with cruel indifference.

Across Canada, Feminist Movements were multiplying petitions to the Department of Justice in order to spare the young woman's head. Filumena-Florence was a woman, a Progenitor whose *Origin of the World* by the painter Gustave Courbet symbolized the essential role. And for this reason alone, the *Law of Retaliation* did not have to be applied to her. Filumena had to survive. Yet, even if the Ministry of Justice is the only one to bear the name of a cardinal Virtue³⁷, Lomer Gouin, the man who straddled this ministry, did not show any benevolence towards her³⁸.

Despite this apparent indifference, throughout Canada and especially in the West, most of the settlers admired the abnegation spirit of the young woman who had sacrificed herself to save the head of the man whom the world considered to be the real murderer of the policeman, the *thinking head*. Unfortunately, all the Madonnas of Southern Italy seemed to have their minds elsewhere. *La Madonna di Polsi* seemed distracted by the Ndrangheta, calabrese mafia that racketed the region since the most distant Roman Empire³⁹. *La Madonna delle Lacrima di Siracusa*

³⁶ •Filumena means Beloved of the Spirit, in Greek.

³⁷ •The four cardinal virtues are: Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Courage.

³⁸ •Lomer Gouin was Canada's Minister of Justice from December 1921 to January 1924, under Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie-King.

³⁹ •This very isolated region had been populated by the first fugitive Christians who feared the Romans. Some of these peasants had ended up getting rich in this region. They had formed a kind of agrarian aristocracy that had given birth to the Ndrangheta. The Madonna of Polsi, venerated in the Sanctuary of Polsi in San Luca is also called the Mountain Madonna. But San Luca is the capital of the Calabrian Ndrangheta, the

was too busy weeping her human tears, as for *the Madonna della Bruna*, only God knew what was distracting her. No divine help came! In these last days of April, the roads of Ottawa remained empty of any *Messenger of Hope; only the grass was greening, and the sun was desperately powdering*, as in Bluebeard's tale. On May 1st, 1923, 24 hours before the date of the execution of the sentence, there was no positive news, no hope of Clemency or commutation, neither from Heaven, nor from Earth.



The sun of May 2nd refused to rise that morning, because Filumena-Florence was going to die in the company of her old lover. The sky was cloudy, dark and scary. It had been two and a half months since they had been sentenced to death in Calgary, and the execution was to take place in *Fort Saskatchewan*, a prison 20 km northeast of Edmonton. Far from all residential areas, this jail was not conducive to riots, fomented either by racists or by opponents of the killing of a woman.

The execution was described as follows in the *CALGARY HERALD*, newspaper of May 3rd, 1923: "On the 2nd of May 1923. Inside the impassable walls of the prison, here, in the gloomy dawn, under the low clouds that ran at full speed through the tearful morning, Mary Florence Lasandro followed Emilio Picariello today on the scaffold. The sun had barely risen above the horizon when the final chapter of the Alberta's fatal smuggling tragedy was written. 'Thus, the Law was finally avenged for the death of its

mafia that ravages the south of the Italian Boot. The name Ndrangheta comes from the Greek *andragathos* = noble man or well born - ἀνήρ, ἀνδρός = manadult as opposed to child + ἄγαθος = good, good quality. As specified, this mountainous region was at the time of the Romans a refuge of Christians hunted down.

representative Constable Steve Lawson, who occurred last September in Coleman.

"Dawn had just begun to brighten the eastern horizon, when the small solemn group of prison officials approached the death row cell where Picariello had been incarcerated for the past four months. The door squeaked for the last time on its hinges, and the prisoner came out with no hope of returning. Preceded by Chief Guard Griggs and Sheriff Rae accompanied by three guards, and followed by Father Fidélis, a Franciscan monk and parish priest of the small Catholic parish church of this area, Picariello walked a firm step towards the scaffold. When the executioner Wakefield walked up to him to pass him the black hood, Picariello cried out:

—Keep this abominable thing away. I can cope with what is going to happen to me by keeping my eyes open.

It was explained to him that the law required that the black Hood be in place on the face of the convict, but the request was still refused.

—You hang an innocent! May God help me, Picariello added, standing in the center of the trapdoor.

It was precisely 5:15. Ten minutes later, the body was removed. In the hour, Madame Filumena-Florence Lassandro followed Picariello on the scaffold. She had spent the night in prayer with a priest. She refused her breakfast, which made a great contrast with Picariello's bacon and eggs, buttered toasts, and coffee, just before he died.

"With a firm and determined step, Filumena-Florence Lassandro began her long march that led her from the women's building, through the courtyard of the prison, to the Gate of Eternity. She hesitated for a moment as she

reached the gloomy scaffold. The modulated song of a sparrow poured out its sudden and striking notes into the grim morning, like a glimmer of hope.

—*Why do they hang me when I have done nothing?* she asked the small group that stood motionless at the foot of the scaffold... *Is there no one here who has the slightest empathy for me? ... I forgive everyone.*

Eleven minutes later, the body was taken away." Florence was the only woman hanged in Alberta by a Court Order.



The two convicts died with courage and dignity; even Picariello who, from a strictly legal point of view, *should not* have died on the gallows since it was not he who held the firearm. He faced death as a true Roman Centurion. In fact, he was hanged only to justify the death of Florence. If he had not been executed, the woman could never have been either. Reading the official document of crime statistics —precisely that of Emilio Picariello located on that page— one can see that, despite the abolition of the *Test Act* by George IV throughout the Empire, the British Administration continued to publish the religion of the citizens in order to take this fact into account in their decisions. Thus, a Catholic, a candidate for Higher Education or Civil Service, was refused by the Administration of England.

In the case of Filumena-Florence, Italian-Canadian-feminist cultural movements radically condemned its execution. So, to stigmatize what women consider an injustice, they produced an opera aptly named *Filumena*. This

Canadian opera —created by John Estacio, libretto⁴⁰ by John Murrell— opened at the *Banff Arts Centre* during the *Banff Summer Festival* in the 2002-2003 artistic season. It was not a resounding success!

Criminal Statistics					
Name	Emilio Picariello				
Place of Trial	Calgary, Alberta				
Date of Trial	22nd September 1922				
Date of Offence	21 September 1922				
Residence	Blairmore				
Occupation	Stage player				
Sex	Male				
Age	14 3				
Where born	Italy				
Religion	R.C.				
Education	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Superior</td> <td rowspan="2">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Elementary</td> </tr> </table>	Superior	Yes	Elementary	
Superior	Yes				
Elementary					
Read	Yes				
Write	No				
Drink	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>Moderately</td> <td rowspan="3">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Immoderately</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Temperate</td> </tr> </table>	Moderately	Yes	Immoderately	Temperate
Moderately	Yes				
Immoderately					
Temperate					
Married	Yes				
Offence charged (state charges, and if necessary)	Murder				
Offence convicted of	Slander				
Previous convictions	Death by hanging				
Sentence	Clerk				

Police Record of Emilio Picariello, Justice Archives, Ottawa. It can be seen that the convict's religion continues to be mentioned despite the official abolition of the anti-catholic Test Act.

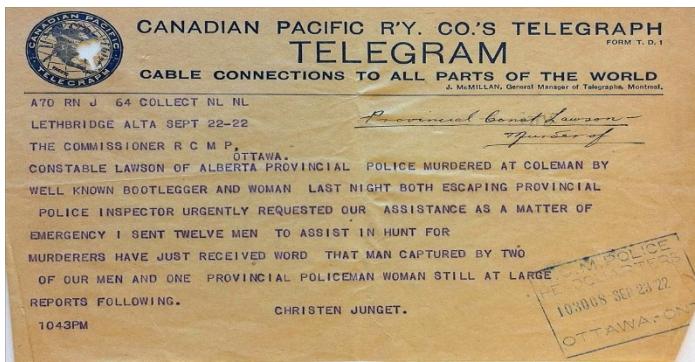
Thus, died Filumena-Florence Lassandro for having believed that she was really the mistress of an Emperor

⁴⁰ •Libretto = Text.

Crimes and Punishments of Canadian Women

above the Law. Curiously, the only injustice in this execution was the death of Emperor Pic himself, as he had not killed anyone.

Telegram announcing the murder of Constable Lawson. Priv.Coll



Execution of Florence. Priv.Coll.

-2-

Deadly attraction

The Marie Beaulne-Viau Murder Case, 1929

The year 1929 was certainly one of the most lucrative for *the Executor of the High Works of the Dominion of Canada* at the time, Arthur English. Like his predecessor, Ratley Prior, he had been the itinerant executioner of the English army in the colonies, particularly in South Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East. This had allowed him to get his hands on a multitude of pirates (from the China Seas, the South Seas¹), and Scottish Highlander soldiers or deserting Sikhs who constituted the backbone and essentials of the English army.

At the same time, Arthur English had been able to realize that he did not dislike hanging his fellow men. Like the serial killer or the sniper², the executioner apparently gets great satisfaction from being the one who, like God, holds the ultimate power to end a human being's life. Certainly, he cannot —like God or like the murderer— decide to let this person live, but he can at least give the victim a few precious seconds of respite by letting the execution drag on.

¹ •The South Seas were the Pacific Ocean and more precisely, the South Pacific.

² •The shooter or sniper is ambushed and usually equipped with a scope or shooting telescope.

From the end of the nineteenth century, international tension rose dangerously under the pressure of the new imperial Germany. Bismarck had said that his country *had settlers but no colony, while France had plenty of colonies but did not have settlers to populate them* because the young men of this warlike country³ were rather sent to the battlefields to perish *en masse*. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the German Empire had 75,000,000 inhabitants and France only 39,000,000. So, beware!

Arthur English's country, England, which through the centuries had made a covenant with the German states (Prussia) to seize the French trade, came to make an alliance with France for fear of the unified German Empire, which since 1875 had been building battleships and battle-cruisers, the famous *dreadnoughts*⁴. War was therefore inevitable in Europe and many English sought refuges in their colonies or in the United States, to stay away from battlefields and spare themselves the dangers of war.

Fleeing the scent of religious intolerance and exile as far as possible from the war killings were the two fundamental factors that so quickly populated the many colonies of the English Empire⁵. Among this multitude of emigrants from England, Arthur English sought a position as *Executor of High Works throughout the Empire*, which was then reaching its peak. In 1912, he succeeded in obtaining the

³ •Europe has seen 53 major conflicts, and France has participated in 49 of them (England in 43). Since about 1200, France has taken part in 185 battles and won 132. This number makes it the nation with the most victories.

⁴ •At the end of the nineteenth century, the technological development of torpedoes forced admirals to fight from far away. The caliber of the main artillery thus increased in enormous proportions (more than 400 mm), as did the cuirasses.

⁵ •The Australian prison provided only a few thousand individuals.

post of *Official Executioner of Canada*. All his life he tried to make believe, by a curious "coquetry", that he belonged to the dynasty of English Executioners Ellis. He claimed to be the nephew of the last of these hangmen. But this was just a boastful lie.



Hangman English immigrated to our country that same year because if the Europeans were sharpening their "fourchette"⁶ it was not to eat snails. His Canadian experience in this unorthodox profession, English acquired it as assistant to the previous executioner Daniel James Ratley Prior, also born in England, known by the pseudonym Radcliffe⁷ and who had an impressive twenty years of experience in the killing of Canadians. English himself, under the pseudonym of Arthur Ellis, was no less effective; he hanged a little more than one Canadian a month — about 300 in all— during the 23 years that his career lasted, until March 28, 1935, when his dipsomania made him commit a serious professional error in Montreal that resulted in the outright decapitation of a condemned woman: Tomasina Sarao⁸. Another consequence of this bloody mistake was that the public was forbidden to visit the theater of the executions. Until then, the authorities thought that the public performance of the executions was a serious warning to potential criminals. These same authorities realized that

⁶ •[Snail] forks: nickname for the first bayonets of World War I, long steel spikes 60cm long.

⁷ •And sometimes Radcliffe, or John R. Radcliffe or Thomas Radcliffe.

⁸ •As we will see in the appropriate chapter.

the horror and sordid abomination of the killings gave weapons to the abolitionists of capital punishment.

This famous publicity was the very reason which had led the Christians to choose, as a symbol of their faith, the Roman gallows on which their God (Jesus) had been tortured to death: the crucifix. It reminded them above all that Christ had died for sinners. In memory of the hangman English (Ellis), *the Canadian Crime Writers' Association* awards the Arthur Ellis Award each year in both official languages of Canada. This award is associated with a curious trophy⁹.



Marie Beaulne
Source: National Archives

By 1929, many Canadians were desperately struggling to survive the Great Depression. This economic crisis made headlines and ravaged our world left to the disgusting hands of the scoundrel financiers and the rich criminals of Finance. This year 1929 was precisely one of the most fruitful for our Executor of the High Works, as it is true that, even if poverty is not vice, it nevertheless pushes the poor to commit crimes in order to survive. As a result, on January 11th, 1929, English hanged Pepitone Gaetano, 44, in Chicoutimi prison. On the 8th of the following month he executed Joseph Chabot, 38, in the Montreal prison of



⁹ •This wooden trophy can be seen on the site <http://www.sfwriter.com/ellis.htm>

Bordeaux. On August 23, the date that marked the end of the road for Marie Beaulne, the unfortunate heroine of this chapter, English prepared to end the days of this couple of criminal lovers, Marie Beaulne (42) and Philibert Lefebvre (32), at the Gatineau prison¹⁰ for the murder of Marie's husband, the old Zéphyr Viau. English knew that a little week later, on the 30th of the same month, he was going to take the life of Ernest Messier, 38, in Bordeaux prison, and that on December 20th, just before Christmas, he was to execute two teenagers, Laurence and Normand Ménard (18 and 22 years old), still in Bordeaux prison, for the murder of John Durham perpetrated during an armed robbery. "*The work*"



Arthur Ellis Awards.

was not lacking for the executioner of Canada who could thus put a little butter in the spinach of his Christmas Eve. To these Quebec executions, were going to be added five hangings in the other provinces¹¹.

¹⁰ •Formerly Hull.

¹¹ •Mike Hack, John Ivanchuk, William Megill, George O'Neil and finally Ichimatsu Tokumatu.

In that sad year 1929, therefore, a large annual total of twelve Canadians would die at his hand, of which Quebec provided the lion's share, a share that was actually unenviable. Judges usually have a heavier hand with minorities. This year of economic crisis therefore produced an exceptional vintage since the annual average of executions under the Confederation was, usually: 7.



Since the year 1867, which was the first of the Canadian Confederation¹², 1481 Canadians were sentenced to death, including 50 women. These 50 criminals had taken the lives of 79 victims. Yet most of their death sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. As a result, only 11 women were executed. The crimes of all the others went partially unpunished. On the other hand, of the 42 male accomplices who helped these women to carry out these same crimes, 36 were hanged. In seven cases, even, the male accomplice was executed while the female criminal obtained a commutation of sentence that saved her head. Of these 1481 sentenced to death, 710 were executed¹³: 699 men and 11 women.



But let's come to the involuntary heroine of this chapter. July 9th, 1917, was a great celebration in Montpellier¹⁴. Zéphyr Viau, a modest farmer, married gorgeous

¹² •And until total abolition at the end of the twentieth century.

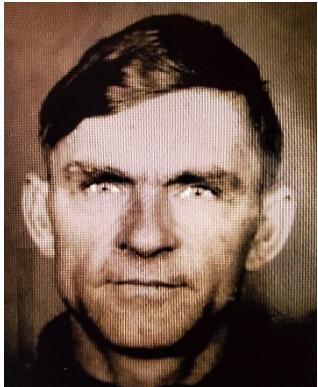
¹³ •Among them there were 25 soldiers executed during the First World War. For desertion and 2 for murder. One during the Second War.

¹⁴ •Montpellier, Quebec. There are also 5 Montpelier in the United States, in Vermont, Idaho, North Dakota, Louisiana and Indiana, and only one Montpellier in France.

Marie Beaulne. He couldn't believe his eyes and ears. He was going to be able to bite into her opaline flesh like in a great apple. This beautiful girl of twenty years her junior had offered him on a silver platter her heart and her Virtue... at least what was left of it. Until then, the old Zéphyr, with such a harmless name, had known only misfortune, poverty and misery. To feed his family, he had worked all his life as a madman in second-rate jobs, very poorly paid.

Happiness, capricious and often perverse, likes to deny itself to those who covet it the most, like a beautiful lady who wants to be courted endlessly. It finally seemed to cast a benevolent gaze on his very modest person. Seeing himself accompanied by this attractive girl, Zéphyr couldn't help but hope that luck would finally look him favorably in the eyes. In fact, his darling was not the most beautiful girl in the village. But he saw her youth with the eyes of his heart, through the filter of Love that usually metamorphoses mediocrity into perfection, ugliness into beauty, and brutality into gentle clemency.

Zéphyr had therefore chosen a "youth" to deceive his canonical age and his Destiny. As for Mary, she simply coveted the poor farm and the infertile land of the Old. The two Montpellier residents were going to pay with their lives for this very human choice. Mary could not help but be immediately tyrannical with her husband, and even "without any modesty, without common sense" claimed some neighbors. According to the entourage of the newly-weds, Mary ruled her husband's Zéphyr with a brutality of Aquilon, that evil wind of the Canadian North; and this, in an ostensible and humiliating way, without any concern



Louis-Philippe Lefebvre. National Archives, Ottawa.

for what will be said. Today's psychiatrists would without hesitation classify this type of personality in the unengaging category of "perverse-narcissists."

In this year 1929, the couple lived in Montpellier, a village located in the hills of the Gatineau River, 70 km north-east of the city of this name

which then bore the sad toponym of Hull. A decade had not passed when a young and handsome thug arrived in the village who would change the couple's destiny. Some bad boys, too lazy to work, spend their time wondering who they may parasitize, and they choose the most vulnerable couples, those whose life was weakened by too long separations or too pronounced age differences. Like hyenas on the hunt, they observe the weak, speculate on their chances of success, and assail the woman alone with delicate flattery. They "enfirouapent" them¹⁵ in their lies, in the freshness of their charm, and intoxicate them with seduction. Few can resist these demonic predators for a long time.

The young and handsome thug Lefebvre saw right away that the Beaulne-Viau couple was so frail that a simple breath, a burning breath, would be enough to bring him down. He arranged to become the friend of old Zephir to

¹⁵ Enfirouaper = to lure, to fool, to deceive customs officials. Interesting etymology. Enfirouaper from the English: *in-fur wrapped*. During Prohibition, smugglers carried alcohol bottles from Québec to the United States by wrapping bottles in fur.

better seduce his wife and precipitate the fall of the couple. One day, when the old Zéphyr sank deep into the woods to try to gain a few piastres in a distant forest sawmill, Madame succumbed and quickly took the habit, unorthodox for the time, of shamelessly savoring the prosaic pleasures of the flesh with this loser deadbeat, a vigorous and young trapper named Louis-Philibert Lefebvre. This lover was a handsome man barely 32 springs, thirty years the youngest of the old husband, a joyful and ardent fornicator at the forehead all haloed by the prestige of the veterans of the Great War who think that the Nation owes them everything. Mary granted her young libidinous hurricane of lover, the fieriest embraces for which she was very quickly parsimonious with her husband's Zéphyr. She thus had, from her husband and her substitute, eight children, the last of whom were still enjoying, at the time of the crime which is the subject of this chapter, the joys and carelessness of childhood or the revolts of adolescence. Who could then ensure whether a child was born to his legal father or the passing lover?

Very quickly, they came to consider with lightness and carelessness the elimination of the old man to spin the perfect love. But by playing with fire you end up getting burned. The solid trapper and his mistress would eventually fall into the trapdoor they built themselves in order to get rid of the old husband too cumbersome. Louis-Philibert Lefebvre's file was written as follows, according to the Archives of the Provincial Police 1857 which became the Sûreté du Québec: "*Used to live in Montreal. Three years ago, wanted for theft in Montreal; left the city to settle in Montpellier. There he worked for a short time as a*

lumberjack and as a jack-of-all-trades¹⁶ in a local hotel. Most of the time, does not work. He hunts, fishes and runs the country. Lives in Zéphyr Viau's house when he goes to work in his distant forest camp. Bad reputation in Montpellier. Many are afraid of him because he is used to carrying a gun¹⁷."



What unrelenting *Fate* had simmered for Zéphyr (Destiny hatches a deadly project and a final shipwreck for all human beings) happened on Sunday, January 27th, 1929. That day, the old and naïve Zéphyr died of a rather mysterious disease that took him away very quickly... too fast! Father Lucien Major, parish priest, found strange the speed with which his parishioner had left this world, especially since he had heard, by way of public rumors or confessed sin or gossip, of the assiduous affair maintained by Mary with this scoundrel of Louis-Philibert.

So, when Mary clumsily insisted that the burial be done *as soon as possible*, the clergyman felt the mustard—or rather horseradish—rise in his nose and suspicions in his mind. There was an urgency, certainly, but not to bury the one he already considered a victim. If the urgency existed, it was to warn the judicial authorities. Nowadays, Mary would probably have asked that the body be immediately subjected to *cremation* or to *aquamation* (as today's murderers do), but at that time, religious Canon Law

¹⁶ •Jack-of-all-trades. Pejorative expression, rascal, scoundrel...

¹⁷ •Provincial Police Identification Office, 43 rue Saint-Vincent, Montreal, July 12th, 1929. Public Archives of Canada.

prohibited it, which prevented many murderers from using this evasion to camouflage their crime.

The priest transmitted his suspicions to the Gatineau police office of *the Sûreté du Québec*, which then bore the cavalier name of "la PP".¹⁸ Thus, as soon as the young Marie began to savor her dear newfound freedom and all the amenities of widowhood —including the full and complete enjoyment of the property of her late husband— she was taken aback when she suddenly saw a squad of investigators from the Gatineau Research Brigade, appear in her Montpellier farm, with their eyebrows furrowed, the inquisitive eye and the mustache in circumflex accent.

The body had to be exhumed for autopsy. And not surprisingly, Dr. E. Fontaine, a forensic pathologist for the great City of Montreal, found in the bowels of the deceased, doses of strychnine sufficient to kill two good-sized bullocks. The timid Zéphyr miraculously managed to denounce —beyond his granite tombstone— the sad truth in the ears of the investigators. These had, of course, heard about the adulterous affair of Marie with her young lover Louis Philibert, a gallant plot that the old Zéphyr had probably been the only one to ignore in the village and even in the country... or rather the only one who pretended to ignore.

It is often repeated that *what is ignored does not harm*, but in this case, it must be acknowledged that the poor man might not have lost his life so tragically if he had

¹⁸ •La Police Provinciale in Québec. In French slang, "la pépée" is a "vamp" or "femme fatale."

been fully aware of his dishonor; to the extent that it is the cuckold who is dishonored and not the cowardly traitor.

Thanks to these revelations from beyond the grave, the two lovers were immediately locked up in jail. But, curiously—as in all the criminal files in this work that would tend to prove that men are morally less robust than women in supporting a false thesis—it turned out that Louis-Philibert, Marie's lover, was not psychologically as resistant as his mistress. As a result, the young trapper quickly began to lose his footing under the precise and too indiscreet questions of the astute investigator.

After confessing, the hero of the Great War claimed "bravely" that the initiative of this crime was entirely the responsibility of Mary. She had matured the details for a long time, for months. *True?* He himself, Louis-Philibert, had bought the *strychnine*, but it was his mistress, and she alone, who had made the decision to administer it to her old husband.

Mary, for her part, had hitherto persisted in formally *denying any participation* in Zéphyr's death. She only conceded that, if there had been poisoning, it was only due to a very regrettable accident. This brainless Zéphyr had probably mistakenly sipped a poisoned shell intended for rats, field mice and other voles. What a damn dizzy, this darling! What bad luck for all of us, who today no longer have enough tears to mourn him bitterly... and especially for himself! We will regret him very much!

The investigators immediately thought that even the untimely revelations of her lover would not easily destabilize and disarm a soul as well tempered as that of Mary.

But, contrary to expectations, this was not the case. As soon as Marie Beaulne learned that her young lover —the so-called invulnerable warrior of the Great War— had flatly confess everything and that he charged her with full responsibility for the crime, she immediately changed her chorus.

—*No! It was not an unfortunate accident!*

Louis Philibert himself had made the move on his own initiative. As for her, she had not participated in it at all, neither near nor far! Nor "by thought, by action or omission" as the holy prayer said at the time, anxious to flush out sin from the depths of the brain. It was very clear! Seeing that the two accomplices were beginning to accuse each other and blame each other for the crime like a ping-pong ball game, the police understood that they were arriving at the climax, at the zenith of their investigation; the embacle of lies and denials freed itself.



In early June 1929, the couple of killers were tried in Gatineau (Hull) by the Honorable Justice Louis Joseph Loranger of the Superior Court, sitting in *the Court of King's Bench*. Mr. J.A. Parent and Mr. F.-B. Major represented the Crown. Mr. Jean D'Aoust and Paul Sainte-Marie, assigned to the Defense, suggested that the defendants plead not guilty. Because if they had pleaded guilty, the only price would have been *death!* The presence of the lawyers would not even have been necessary.

The trial, botched in a day and a half, began on Tuesday, June 11th, 1929, and ended the next day at about 4:30 p.m. At the beginning of the first day the twelve jurors were chosen. The Prosecution presented 11 charging witnesses before the Honorable Judge Loranger, including Father P. Major, parish priest of the Montpellier village, farmers Anatole and Roger Bissonnette, Pierre Beaulne, brother of the Defendant, Donat Strasbourg and Honorius Viau (brother of the victim), Doctors Théoret of Montpellier and E. Fontaine of Montreal, Lysiane Viau (wife of Osias Carrière and sister of the deceased), Detective Jean-François Dalpé...

The Prosecution witnesses were all sworn in. If the Charge was energetic and dynamic, the Defense was confined to an indolent and pusillanimous rearguard combat. In fact, the Defendants were poorly defended by two junior court-appointed attorneys, who lacked vigor, cunning and artificial imagination in the face of the brilliant Crown Prosecutors. We know that the genius of a lawyer is to know how to present the alleged facts in such a way as to exonerate his client or at least to cast a doubt, whether the accused is guilty or innocent. And even if it is never admitted, the most liar will be the best, provided that the lie cannot, of course, be apparent, exposed, and proven.

The Defendants stated that they did not have to offer proof of their innocence, and for good reason! To defend such an obvious lie (non-guilt), it would have taken a true Master of Lies, a genius of deception, one of those lawyers who know how to transform, with a single wave of a magic wand, the most implausible myths into clear and crystalline Truth, like the alchemists of yesteryear who suggested

that they were turning *lead* into *gold* thanks to the *philosopher's stone*. No! The only one who could have done this miracle would have been Me. Raymond Daoust, the only man subtle enough, "*Machiavellian enough to have Beelzebub in person acquitted by a jury of 12 ecclesiastics*" as one of his contemporaries claimed. But this genius of mystification was only 6 years old in 1929.

If we did not already know it, we learned that, "full of life, strength and courage, the victim, Zéphyr Viau, husband of Mary, was a poor man who laboriously earned his family's living from working in forestry workcamps. During his many absences, unfortunately, his wife cheated on him with Louis-Philibert Lefebvre, one of the two accused. Zéphyr realized it. He remonstrated his wife and warned his pseudo-friend Louis-Philibert not to reappear at his home. He went so far as to threaten the lover." Their friendship was definitively poisoned.

The King's Prosecutor, who reconstructed the scene before the jurors, added that, in the face of the husband's threats, Louis-Philibert made this comment, sibylline for some, but very clear for others:

—*If this is so, I would rather Viau died than me!*

The devious Tartuffe voluntarily pretended to believe that his life was now in danger and that the murder of the old husband would only be a kind of "*self-defense*", a preventive attack. A few days earlier, Louis-Philibert had even told Mr. Roger Bissonnette, one of the Prosecution witnesses:

—Old as he is, Viau probably does not have one year left to live...

It was one of those banal phrases that exhale all their meaning after the crime, like purpurine colchics that only become deadly after being ripped off. Moreover, Bissonnette hastened to let the police know as soon as the death of the old husband was announced. The future showed that this divinatory commentary, which could have been a mere innocuous remark, had undoubtedly marked the prelude or the *climax* of the conspiracy.

As early as January 1929, in a time of celebration and contemplation during which Canadians were making *The Good Resolutions*¹⁹ intended to be abandoned during the year, Zéphyr Viau was suddenly taken by violent pains in the bowels along with heartburn. He had just returned to his forest camp at the end of the First of January. This confirmed the confession of the accused Marie Beaulne who had finally admitted to having given her husband a concoction before his departure for the forestry camp. Fortunately, the cook at his workplace prepared an emetic decoction that made him vomit and rid his stomach of everything that cluttered it.

Thanks to this initiative, the unfortunate man was able to survive a few more weeks and drink the bitter chalice of his marriage to the dregs. Shortly afterwards,

¹⁹ January 1st is in Canada one of the *Obligation Holidays* along with Christmas and Sundays of the year. The other traditionally obligatory feasts are transferred to the following Sunday. January 1st was once the day when Catholics knelt before their father and set out the Good Resolutions they had decided to make for the coming year (no longer getting drunk, no longer criticizing, no longer *running the petticoat*, missing Sunday Mass or whatever...) They also took stock of the year that was coming to an end.

Lefebvre handed over a bottle of strychnine to Mary. It was the ultimate weapon. In the eternal battle of poison against the antidote —as exciting through the ages as the cannon-armor conflict to dominate the battlefields— *strychnine* remained the undisputed Empress of Assassination, the real "*Queen of Succession Powders*".

In small doses, strychnine remained a dope that increased the respiratory capacity of athletes. One of the first American Marathon champions doped himself with strychnine²⁰. In 1945, seeing his Empire-of-a Thousand-Years collapse miserably after 12 short semesters in front of the Soviet hordes, Adolf Hitler was administered six strychnine injections a day to endure the hell of Berlin under the bombardments of the Russians who came to show him that the Slavs were no less supermen than the Aryans.

Marie Beaulne, Zéphyr's loving wife, asked her lover Louis-Philibert if he knew how much strychnine her husband could swallow to obtain the desired result.

—*As big as a bean,*" replied her accomplice laconically. That's enough to kill a fox!

—*If I gave him half of the bottle, would it be done?*

—*Arrange it as you wish,* was the evasive answer of Louis-Philibert who seemed to ardently wish for the end without worrying about the means.

—*I will arrange it well enough that he will not notice!* commented Marie Beaulne.

²⁰ Thomas Hicks, in 1904.

This crucial conversation is taken from the confessions of the accused Lefebvre, deposited at *the National Archives of Justice in Ottawa*.



On January 19th, after a 23 kilometer trekking through snow-covered and rugged forest trails, Zéphyr finally arrived home, in a great state of exhaustion. Remember that he lined up no less than 71 winters! And what winters! Abitibi winters —in other words Arctic or Siberian— eight months long, *which had worn him down to the hub!* Despite his advanced age and extreme fatigue, he was well and happy to be back and soak himself in his family environment, which he financed with the sweat of his brow but which he probably did not imagine so corrupt.

—*What reception did he receive?* shouted the Crown Prosecutor Me J-A Parent, furious, stinging Marie Beaulne with his vengeful index finger as if he wanted to pierce her face with a bayonet. *The accused, his wife, the one in whom his trust and affection were to rest, offered him food. He refused, because he no longer trusted her. She insisted, and treacherously poured the poison into the soup she served him. She knew what was going to happen. She waited, and when she saw that the poison was beginning to work, she called the priest, who ran, to see all the symptoms of poisoning.*

If Zéphyr was careful not to denounce his wife whom he still loved, probably to spare her the horrors of dishonor, this was not the case of the village priest, Father Lucien Major. He noticed that the wife seemed quite

indifferent to her old husband's agony. She watched him calmly, as he writhed in pain.

—*She seemed to be coldly waiting for the crucial moment, the fatal outcome!* the clergyman commented, brandishing his black biretta with a vehement gesture.

On the initiative of the parish priest, Dr. Théoret was called to the rescue, but it was not without objection that Mary let him examine the patient. Then, little by little, before the eyes of the very worried doctor, the crisis subsided and the patient seemed to be better. Did he have to be robust and healthy to recover so quickly from this strychnine treatment? The doctor, who did not suspect the assassination attempt, made a "small" misdiagnosis by declaring a simple intestinal indisposition.

The next day, Zéphyr Viau felt better. He was even able to get up and smoke a few rolled cigarettes with Anatole Bissonnette who came to pay him a small friendship visit. As he had expressed the desire to take a slight purge to put his heart back in place, his wife, who wanted to put an end once and for all, and wished to give the *coup de grâce* to her unwelcome old husband, so cumbersome, so hard to kill, who stubbornly refused to die, his wife, therefore, prepared another concoction, a *medicinal mixture* to which, for the third time, she added strychnine²¹.

²¹ •Strychnine is a highly toxic alkaloid extracted from the nux vomica (*Strychnos nux-vomica*), used as a stimulant in very low doses. It is the classic poison in the fight against crows and small rodents, but, curiously, it is not toxic to the guinea pig. Two French pharmacists, Pierre Joseph Pelletier and Joseph Caventou isolated strychnine in 1818. Strychnine is obtained by grating the vomit nut in boiling alcohol and then distilling the resulting liquor.

Having done so, Mary, who had just noticed her husband's reluctance to accept food from her treacherous hand, was careful not to present him with the infernal poison herself, knowing that his mistrust had been stimulated by previous abortive attempts. Very clever, she asked her own daughter Françoise Carrière to help her dear father ingest the poison. Confidently, the latter swallowed the pseudo drug... then, to ensure the result, two more deadly mixtures a little later.

At her mother's behest, the young woman made him unsuspectingly absorb all these sinister lethal potions. Later, Mrs. Carrière herself, horrified at the thought of having killed her dear father, will entrust all the details to the investigator Dalpé during the Preliminary Inquest of the Coroner.

—*Mrs. Carrière admitted*, trumpeted the Crown Prosecutor Me J.-A. Parent, in an oratory flight, his big hairy index finger this time brandished towards the sky, *having poured the scale of the poison into the bottle that Lefebvre had given him. This is her confession, reported by Detective Dalpé during the evening at the Hotel de Montpellier, even before the incarceration of the suspects.* They had been taken there as witnesses during the Coroner's Inquest. They were not yet under any charges when they started talking!

This time, the consequences were radical. After absorbing three successive doses of medicinal "salts", the effect turned out to be definitive and complete. The unfortunate Viau expired without his wife, the accused, seeming to worry, to care even to wash him, change him or provide

him with a clean sheet to receive the Holy Viaticum that the priest brought him in all haste to facilitate his entry into the House of the Good Shepherd. One could have heard stealing a mosquito in the room of the Court of Assizes.

The Prosecutor, eager to highlight and stigmatize Mary's actions, castigated the accused in these terms:

—This is the most complete act of treason that can be perpetrated. The accused... has committed the most heinous crime that can be committed. We understand a crime of passion. We explain a gun shot in a moment of overexcitement, but to slowly kill a being who has his trust, to betray him by offering him food, and to offer him poisoned drugs under the pretext of wanting to heal and save him, it is despicable! Seeing someone twist in the anxieties of death, to be able to save him and watch him die by continuing three or four times to pour, drop by drop, the poison until death ensues, it is atrocious and undignified!

After vehemently fulminating against Marie Beaulne's criminal behavior, Prosecutor Parent directed his Ciceronian index finger and stentor voice to Louis-Philibert Lefebvre, who, as far as possible, tucked his head into his shoulders and kept his eyes nailed to the hardwood floor:

—The accused Lefebvre knew the actions of his accomplice Marie Beaulne; it was he who provided the poison... and he didn't say anything... It would have been easy for him at least to warn Viau to be on his guard... Viau's death allowed him to marry the accused. He says it himself:

"There was talk of marriage between Marie Beaulne and me, after and before the death of Zéphyr Viau!" The tearing apart of their conscience "explains the full confessions they both made with their full consent and without coercion, in the free exercise of their freedom," the eloquent and voluble Prosecutor shouted at the top of his voice.

The autopsy of the corpse had revealed the perpetration of the crime by the presence of strychnine:

—Dr. Fontaine tells us that he found 6.6 grains²² of poison in the bowels of the victim, enough to kill ... 12 men! Even if an accomplice has not administered the deadly poison himself, he incurs, if he has provided it to the killer, the same criminal responsibility as the one who administered it!



At 3:30 p.m. on June 12th, the exhausted jurors retired to deliberate, and by 4:00 p.m. they were ready to render their verdict. All were convinced, without any reservation, of the criminal guilt of the lovers, and they were in full agreement that the president of the jury should declare them:

GUILTY!

²² •According to the medieval English *Weights and Measures System* which is none other than the official French System of the *Foires de Champagne en la Ville de Troyes*, one grain (^{gr}) US = 64.79892^{mg} therefore a total of 427.672872^{mg} of poison. In the apothecary Weights and Measures System in England, parallel to other English systems (of French origin, such as the *Avoirdupois* and *Troy* or *Troyes* systems), grain is a subdivision of the ounce: 1 pound = 12 ounces; 1 ounce = 8 drams; 1 dram = 3 scruples; 1 scruple = 20 grains.

No recommendation for Clemency or Grace came to soften the harshness of the two verdicts. This was, of course, a very bad omen for the sentences that would result.

Judge Louis-Joseph Loranger then turned to Marie Beaulne to ask her if she knew of any detail that would save her a death sentence:

—*I am not guilty!* she simply replied.

Then the judge read the sentence:

—*The Sentence of the Law now pronounced against you, Marie Beaulne, is that you will be taken back to the common prison of this county from which you came, and that Friday, the twenty-third day of next August, of the year 1929, within the walls of the prison in which you will then be detained, you will be hanged by the neck until death ensues. May God have mercy on your soul!*

The judge then addressed the accused Louis-Philibert Lefebvre:

—*Do you have anything to say so that the death sentence is not pronounced against you?*

—*I ask for mercy... I'm innocent!* Louis-Philibert stammered, morally collapsed.

—*The Sentence of the Law now pronounced against you, Philibert Lefebvre, is that you will be returned to the common prison of this county from which you came, and that on Friday, the twenty-third day of next August, of the year 1929, within the walls of the prison in which you will then*

be detained, you will be hanged by the neck until death ensues. May God have mercy on your soul!



Marie and Louis-Philibert then asked the Federal Authorities to grant them *Clemency*. But they were denied. The authorities did not want to let the execution drag on, knowing that the hanging of a woman could degenerate into bloody riots among the French-speaking population. Québécois are hot-blooded, it's well known; almost as much as their cousins in Europe, who consider strikes, rebellions, insubmission, revolution, and riots to be their National Sports. It was therefore necessary to act as quickly as possible before the *Abolitionist Movements* succeeded in recovering and organizing the resistance.



Marie Beaulne, who enjoyed a robust temperament, apparently kept an exemplary calm until her execution, but her lover collapsed psychologically when he saw the inevitable date of his death approaching, without the Order of Clemency arriving, which would have commuted the death to life imprisonment, or in distant and definitive exile.

Paradoxically, the *Veterans Organization of the First World War* were the first to react. To their pressure group, the *Abolitionists of Capital Punishment* and *Feminist Movements* tried to join forces in the ultimate goal of saving the heads of either of the two criminals. But the action of all these organizations was not always coordinated and logical. Indeed, the Veterans of the Great War simply

wished, out of solidarity for a veteran, to transfer responsibility for the crime to the sole head of Marie Beaulne-Viau.

Their representative, Major Maurice Dubrûle, visited the inmate Lefebvre at the Bordeaux prison on behalf of the *Legion of Veterans*. Following this impromptu visit, he wrote the following letter to the Minister of Justice in Ottawa:

"I went to the prison of Bordeaux yesterday to inquire from Private 62,213, Louis-Philippe Lefebvre, of the old 22^{ème} Régiment, what would be best to do in the last instance. To speak the truth, he is pretty much the greatest fool I have met in my life, and more than that, I sincerely believe that this silly is in no way guilty... I am sure he is too stupid to lie in order to help his cause. He possessed this poison to trap the fox, and the woman Viau would have asked him, giving as an excuse that she would use it for the same purpose: trap the fox. It was only a few days later that the woman Viau confessed to him how she had used this poison. Now Lefebvre only vaguely remembers a few names of the officers who were part of the 22^{ème} [vindouz] and his memory is even more vague about the places where he stayed in France; and as I told you earlier, it is far from being a simulator. In my opinion, this soldier has the brain of a 10-year-old child, and again it is flattering him. To give you an example of his simplicity, I wrote to him last week, asking him to give me, as a soldier, all the details that could help us commute his sentence, and he replied that he did not understand anything about my question, to kindly tell him more. In addition, there is

madness in the medical history of his family, there are his aunts who died mad. He confessed to me that the cops had made him sign a document and that he did not know what it was. Obviously, it must have been his confession. In addition, the Court awarded him a very young lawyer who was in his first case, and I have been writing to this scoundrel twice now to get information, and I do not get an answer. At the age of 18, Lefebvre was wounded in the stomach by a horse rush. The guards of Bordeaux told me that the alienist doctor of the prison said he was crazy, and this does not surprise me. Signed JOG Herwig, Administrative Service, Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League.



So, the psychological picture of the condemned man was not brilliant and, obviously, his dear mistress did not love him for his intellectual depth but for something else.

Another organization, English [from England] this one, considered itself simply "*compelled to intervene*" *on behalf of a man who had courageously fought for the British Empire:*

THE CANADIAN LEGION OF THE LEAGUE IN THE SERVICE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE.

July 23rd, 1929, Reference # 62213, concerning Louis P. Lefebvre.

"The ex-soldier named above, sentenced to death, contacted our Organization to request that efforts be made to have his conviction commuted to life imprisonment. Because he is a veteran, that he enlisted at the age of 18 and

served with honor for 4 years in the 22^{ème} Régiment of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, *we are forced* to look for anything in his file that could justify an intervention on his behalf."

"The points mentioned in this intervention are "1- very low mental level. 2- very disciplined in the army. 3- claims to have tried to recover the poison he had provided to Madame Viau before it was administered. 4- condemnation entirely based on his own confessions which do not take into account that led him to provide the poison²³..."



Marie Beaulne, for her part, fought like a lioness, with indomitable courage, to save her own life. She wrote many letters to all those who were likely to lend her a hand, using arguments adapted to each one. She begged, for example, her accomplice to sacrifice himself for her by accepting the responsibility for the whole crime, in order to save a *poor mother*. *If she had not had children, she assured, she would have taken everything upon herself, without hesitation and with a big heart, to save her dear Louis-Philipbert.* But it was only a tricky ruse to which the young gigolo, supposedly unintelligent out of naivety, did not let himself be caught. He knew that *after such a service*, he would never have the opportunity to ask her for any favor in return.

In another letter addressed at the same time to Sheriff Isidore Saint-Pierre of Gatineau County, she changed

²³ •Intervention in favor of the convicted. *National Archives, Ottawa.*

tactics not only by incriminating her lover, but by inexorably blaming him for the entire crime. The letter was in French, full of spelling mistakes that cannot be rendered in English:

"Monsieur Saint-Pierre, sheriff in Hull, Have some consideration for a poor mother who still has 8 children on her hands, and they cry near me to help them. My last one is only 3 years old. Would you think it would be fair because I am not the one who is most guilty in this case. In fact, Lefebvre made me a martyr. He always told me that there was no danger, that I didn't need to be afraid, when he saw that I didn't want to believe him. He told me everything I needed to say., He used charm oils, Radionna oil and then anise oil. He put it on me. You know that "a creature" (a woman) is not strong like a man when he wants to do wrong. As you can see, I am not the one who is most guilty. Ripping away a mother of 8 children for the love of an evil man. Do you think it's fair; if it hadn't been him, it would never have happened. I was with my husband for 25 years. We always got along well and then this slacker comes and separates us and at the same time takes my children away from me; those poor little ones. If they had let me speak at the trial I would have told them. Please send me good news. I put all my trust in you. Have mercy, the Good Lord will reward you. Signed: Mrs. V. Zephyr Viau."



The Canadian Inmate Welfare Association, for its part, joined in calling on the Minister of Justice of Canada to ban mass trials, and especially to no longer execute

women. The fate of the man did not seem to interest this humanitarian organization in the slightest:

THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE WELFARE OF CANADIAN INMATES to the Honourable Ernest Lapointe, Minister of Justice, Ottawa, Ontario, reference *Marie Viau*, Hull:

"Dear Sir,

Concerning the woman named above, who must be hanged next month, on behalf of the Canadian Inmate Welfare Association, I would like to make a motion for commutation of her death sentence. First, we suggest that her case be studied independently of that of the man involved, and that this benefit also be applied to the man. In our view, it is always detrimental to the interests of the two accused to have a joint trial and to be together for the Solicitation of Clemency. The members of our Council do not agree with imposing the death penalty on a woman. Many consider that, in our time, it is repugnant to hang a woman *even guilty, as in this case, of a horrible crime*²⁴.»



Many other individual interventions, petitions and requests besieged the entire Canadian Administration. But, despite all these demands, sometimes in favour of one, sometimes in favour of the other, rarely for both together, the convicts had to face the terrifying reality one morning in the gloomy dawn... the gallows. The fateful day of August 23rd rose.

²⁴ •The segment in italics was highlighted by the author.

As in horror movies, a big storm broke out that disturbed the city of Gatineau (Hull in this time), accompanied by violent flashes of lightning highlighted by the deaf rumblings of thunder. Heaven itself seemed to rebel against the death of a woman, Mother of Humankind. It was planned that the two lovers would have to die separately very early in the morning at the first light of dawn, to avoid the influx of *now* unwanted spectators.

In the past, execution was a warning to potential criminals, but today the publicity of hangings gave weapons to abolitionists. Yet, the complicit storm persisted in creating obstacles, as if Zeus, the God of Thunder, wished to delay these executions. But was it out of *pity*, or rather out of *sadism*, for their agony was unduly prolonged? Zeus had never shone with his sense of empathy for the Greeks whose masterful civilization had died in the birth of European civilization.

Shortly before 8:00^{a.m.}, Louis-Philibert Lefebvre was, by Sheriff Saint-Pierre, extracted from his death row cell which had an unobstructed view of the courtyard in which the sinister gallows stood. The hero of the war seemed paralyzed by fear; even more than he had been to assault through the barbed wires against the German Maxim machine guns. In front of this appalling gallows that was cut out on the sky, his poor legs refused to carry him. Impossible to take a step. His face glowed with perspiration. Was it the morning drizzle or the tears of despair? It had to be carried to the scaffold.

Thus, the trapper found himself in turn on the hatch. He probably did not think of the thousands of beavers,

raccoons, and otters that he himself had executed in his hunting traps. Is it childish and frivolous to compare the agony of a trapped animal, which feels itself dying of cold or suffocation, with that of a human being in the same situation? Some modern scientists claim that animals too can have feelings.

Did Philibert think of the old Zéphyr whose life he had selfishly confiscated? This old Zéphyr, weakened by old age (despite his robustness), writhed in pain and despair on his bed of agony as he felt death slowly take possession of his body, like a fly tied by the bristles of a spider, under the indifferent eye of the woman he still loved. Suddenly, the carillon of the Parliament of Canada sounded, just across the Ottawa River that the thousands of Maistre canoes of French-Canadian coureurs de bois once roamed. The bell rang eight times; it was 8:00 am. It was the last sound perception of the condemned man that reached him through the hood which covered his head and face, to mask his horrible grimaces of despair, his terrible convulsions of agony. The carillon of the Tower of Peace²⁵ was brutally masked by a discordant crunch, that of the hatch that slams under his feet. The distant but cheerful notes of the federal chime stopped abruptly in his head. The hesitant hand of the executioner in a state of permanent alcohol had just activated the gallows. Philibert Lefebvre had plunged into the interstellar journey of which we know only allegories from the fertile imagination of extralucid prophets.

²⁵ •This famous carillon was brand new; it had just been inaugurated two years earlier to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Canadian Confederation.

About ten minutes later, English cut the rope and lowered the body of the lover now freed from his convulsive tremors of fright. He was placed in his coffin while waiting to be evacuated. English closed the hatch, and Sheriff Saint-Pierre —what a suitable name for organizing trips to Heaven!— brought Marie Beaulne-Viau. She took a firm and determined step forward, which seemed to be the fruit of courage. But it was *rage* alone that drew on her face this stoic and assertive rictus. She seemed overflowing with fury. Had she managed to convince herself that she was just a poor victim of society? Her face appeared to glow under the drizzle that continued to clutter the air at the edge of the storm.

Marie climbed the steps of the red machine (red, this time!) with astonishing confidence, without any help from her escort. The executioner English placed her feet on the hatch, tied her legs, being careful not to kneel himself on the Door of Eternity. He passed the hood over her head, and then the rope around her neck, the huge noose against the cervicals, but slightly to the left side, so that under the shock the vertebrae placed cantilevered break like rock crystal.

The prison chaplain, very emotional, approached her, stammering some spiritual advice. With disdain, Marie Beaulne-Viau refused with a sudden chin up this divine help. Too late! Did she remember that it was the parish priest of Montpellier who had reported her to the police? She kept her eyes fixed on the Parliament of Canada in the distance, the only illuminated point that captured her eyes in the darkness, like a flame that attracts the ephemeral midges of the night. The white hood that the executioner

English put on her head, on her eyes, forced them to look inside, at her soul, compelled them to examine the waste of her life. If she had loved poetry, she could have decided to make Alfred de Vigny's thought her own in order to contain her fear:

"*Moaning, weeping, praying is likewise cowardly*²⁶."

She had moaned too much, wept, and prayed in her many pressing requests and imploring solicitations, as do all those who transgress the rules established by their fellow men, and who in order to justify themselves try to blame others, on everyone.

At precisely 8:21 a.m., the slamming of the hatch put an end to her earthly life, a world that certainly killed her, but which she had helped to make atrocious. In ten short minutes, she joined her accomplice, whose insolent youth had made her lose her mind, as well as her old husband who probably forgave her, as always forgive those who love. The *ménage-à-trois* definitely stuck to them. Perhaps this infernal trio continued in Paradise... for Eternity!

In the afternoon, Louis-Philibert's old father came from Montréal to claim his son's body. He carried it away on a horse-drawn carriage to ensure a decent burial.

No one came to claim the body of Marie Beaulne. It was simply thrown as a scrap in the municipal rubbish dump where waste was thrown away. *Acta fabula is!*

²⁶ •A verse from *The Death of the Wolf*, by Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863). *Acta fabula est!* means: the play is played! The drama is over!



The Blue Bonnet Affair

The Tomasina Sarao Murder Case, 1935

Why do some individuals cover their "ego" with huge life insurance? The pretext used is always man's concern—for it is usually men—about the well-being of his survivors, wife and child, in case life is taken away from him¹. Some psychiatrists have diagnosed without any hesitation that such behavior essentially denotes a need to value one's inner self: "I'm worth a million dollars!" And this certainty reassures him of his personal value; it enhances him especially if he needs to be, especially when he is mediocre, when he feels it or fears it confusedly.

This *bounty to kill*, which the holder recklessly places on his own head, risks tempting many bounty hunters short of money. It is as dangerous to place on one's life a bounty that invites murder as it is to walk down the street at night with high-value jewelry. The multitude of life insurance crimes is an irrefutable proof of this.

Nicolas Sarao, an employee of the Montréal Highway Service, was 59 years old when he was murdered. One of the reasons for this was that he had placed a \$10,000 life insurance premium on his head. This sum, which seems negligible today, represented at the time of the Great Depression the equivalent of several hundred

¹ •And life insurance companies play profusely on this string.

thousand dollars, a pretty fabulous sum. Poverty and famine —imported from the United States— reigned everywhere as absolute mistresses, but more particularly in Canada. So, paterfamilias tended, more than today, to protect their wife and children by one or more insurances on their lifes. This Great Depression, as Canadians then called it, had been one of the adverse consequences of the Great War that optimists called "The last War²."

The enormous industrial production necessary for the conduct of the Great War had, in the post-war period, led to an overproduction of consumer goods when the military industry had transformed itself into civilian production. Following the rule that "everything that becomes scarce becomes expensive, but everything that becomes too abundant loses its value", this overproduction had ruined the world economy and led to a planetary economic crisis. *International-Socialism*³, nourished by this poverty, had precipitated, in reaction, the birth of *National Socialism*⁴ which ignited a new war.



But let's momentarily forget the context and introduce the protagonists of this drama. In this year 1934, four

² •In French, " la Der. des Der." or *Last of the Last*. The European population believed that the level of violence and the power of weapons (machine guns, aviation, and artillery) now made war impossible. But we hadn't seen anything yet!

³ •Which took the name of Communism.

⁴ •National Socialism. As if only war could revive the world economy and get the world out of the Crisis. In the United States, the Chairman of the Bureau of American War Industries during the Great War, Bernard Mannes Baruch, recommended that his country, the United States, participate no other than through arms sales, in the Second World War, which was becoming increasingly clear through the mouth of Adolf Hitler. Curiously, Baruch came from a large American Jewish family of Prussian origin. Greater vigilance would have saved mankind many of the horrors.

friends often met in a house in Montréal that was still, for thirty years, the largest metropolis in Canada. It was a typical two-storey house with harmonious wrought iron balustrades forming balconies and external stairs, very useful in case of fire. The fast-pitched roof was pierced by two charming dormers decorated with volutes. That hinted this house had once belonged to a bourgeois family before falling into plebeian hands. It was the home of the old Giovannia Téolis, the mother-in-law of Nicolas Sarao, an immigrant from Southern Italy always dressed in black, the usual color that women from there wore like a burqa as soon as they were married, to make it clear that frivolity and infidelity had no hold on them. The black color was like a permanent justification of their honesty.

Under the roof of cedar shingles that ended in a rounded cowtail in the manner of Russian izbas⁵, several conspirators conversed bitterly under the full direction of Tomasina Sarao, née Téolis, 35, the young wife of old Nicolas Sarao, the husband who was to play the detestable role of victim in this Italian *commedia dell'arte*.

Everyone commented with great interest and passion on the family project to assassinate the bulky Nicolas. It had become necessary to get rid of the old husband because the young wife Tomasina had had the unique chance of falling in love with a young man of only 29 years. She had made him her lover with great enthusiasm and had finally been able to enjoy an unforgettable pleasure that she

⁵ •The cow's tail is, in Architecture, the part of the roof extended in cornice beyond the walls. Rounded cowtails in both Canada and Russia were used to project water and especially snow away from walls when spring avalanches occurred at snowmelt.

had never felt with her old husband, married according to the medieval tradition of the dilapidated South of Italy.

With her lover, it was the intoxicating voluptuousness invented by the Creator himself, when, seeing Noah come out of the ark, after having drowned the whole of humanity too debauched, he had ordered him: "Grow and multiply! Become many and fill the earth⁶!" And to overcome the will of the refractories to paternity as well as the rebels to large families, he had created the irresistible *pleasure of the flesh* against which The Clergy fought with Canon Law and infernal tortures.

This divine pleasure, this great ineffable thrill that she had felt in all her depths, had convinced her to act immediately, because she could never do without it again. And if the old husband had noticed, he would have to inexorably apply the local law of Calabria and Sicily, very close to Sharia, which also dated from the not-so-distant time when southern Italy was Muslim: the immediate killing of the woman to avenge the withered honor of the male⁷.

No! Despite the terrible collusion between Canadian Federal Law (which could send her to death) and Canon Law (the Religious Law which took charge of her to send her to Hell), Tomasina Sarao had the firm intention of not divesting herself of the delectable shoulder of her young lover. With one hand, she would get rid of her old-age-ridden spouse, and with the other, would recover in the

⁶ •Book of Genesis, 5-11.9

⁷ • Southern Italy was Muslim for nearly five centuries, from 828 to 1300, until the reconquest by the French who had also conquered England in 1066.

process the beautiful life insurance, recklessly subscribed by the old man to give himself more importance, more value, more empire over his young wife.

Tomasina was well known in the Italian community of Montreal for having had a few lovers over the years, lovers who had let her glimpse the sublime pleasure, especially that of challenging the authority of the male over his sex, as a good female Québécois by adoption. She had tried everything to discover and explore the heavenly pleasure of the flesh without ever succeeding until then.

Now, with the young Leone Gagliardi, she had reached the prodigious paroxysm of enjoyment, the transcendent delight concocted by God himself (or herself) to force humans and animals to multiply without hope of resistance. Who has not known the spell of this irresistible voluptuousness cannot judge this person!

The conversation in Italian language Solentino dialect was going well between the devious conspirators in the house of Giovanna Téolis. The death of the old man would not only free the beautiful Tomasina from her "male straitjacket", but it would bring her ease and perhaps even wealth in these difficult times of world economic crisis. Love and Money! What better can a woman who has never been entitled to the chapter, who was offered, to her old husband like a lamb to the imam on the day of Eid al-Kebir, a feast that celebrates the memory of Abraham's Sacrifice (Abderrahmane), when Abraham believed he

understood that God was ordering him to kill his only child with a knife⁸.

The lover's name was precisely Leone, and, according to his first name, he was really a lion in the Aet of Love. He was immediately designated to be the killer of the old man. He would be helped in this by a friend, also present in this group of conspirators, Angelo Donofrio 20 years old, a poor student ready to do anything to pay his tuition fees at the Université of Montréal⁹. Leone and Angelo—the angel and the lion—would therefore be the executors of this crime in this Bestiary of Destruction, and their agreement would be perfect; in any case as long as they will not face the gallows.

Tomasina's old mother, Mrs. Giovannia Téolis, was the fourth member of this criminal society. A poorly educated observer of the conspiracy would have thought that she was only an accessory, marginal participant, Honorary Member, so to speak. She would sometimes sit with the other three conspirators at the rectangular table, approve or suggest, and the others would listen only from the ear-lobe.

But in general, she served coffee, biscuits, pasta even, that she prepared like a real Italian Mama. She added a grain of salt, sometimes to her pizza, sometimes to the most effective way to kill her son-in-law. The crucial question was: what was the cleanest and wisest way to end the life of her daughter Tomasina's old husband, to get his fat life-insurance back? Her daughter's existential problem

⁸ •Then, at the time of the murder, God had ordered him to kill a sheep instead!

⁹ •He was then a student at Montreal Catholic High School.

was of great concern to Giovannia. She was married to this old fool who didn't deserve her. Divorce did not exist for the poor. How can we help her? How, for the sake of her daughter, to make disappear this old man, this old schnook, this bulky Nicolas of 85kg, without his death seeming suspicious and the *Sûreté du Québec* sticking their noses into it?

The dilemma that is today almost insoluble, since science manages to associate a pubic hair found in the street with its original pelvis, and the grime accumulated under a nail to a rapist, this dilemma, therefore, was already very complex in 1934. And the four conspirators scratched their heads to find a satisfactory solution to the problem. Yet, thanks to their sustained efforts and the fervent prayers to the Virgin Mary tirelessly ruminated in *salentino*¹⁰ by the old Mama, our four intended assassins had put everything together for the end of the third week of June 1934.

As soon as Tomasina would have received the \$10,000 in life insurance, Gagliardi would get \$1,700 for his essential participation, and Angelo Donofrio \$500 a little later for his subsidiary assistance. That's it for the most part! To deserve this money, the two executors had to lure the old man to a deserted place, murder him cleanly, that is to say *without a trace*. Having done so, a Tomasina in the throes of anguish would go to the nearest police station

¹⁰ •One of the Italian dialects of the Deep South of Italy. Southern Italy had also been Greek. Perhaps the old Mama prayed to Zeus to send the murderous spirits (the Phanoi), whom Zeus (Jupiter) called upon to murder an undesirable, or even the Islamic Ashashins (assassins) who took hashish drugs to slip into a crowd to murder on command, before being themselves slaughtered on the spot by the guards. The Heaven of the Ancients had something pandemic.

to declare between two poignant sobs that, that evening, "she was walking with her dear husband who had wanted to be away for a few minutes to relieve in the oleander bushes some prostatic personal problem.

This permanent "craving" was caused by his poor bladder stubbornly overlapping his old enlarged prostate. To her horror, he had not returned. Since then, she had literally consumed herself with anxiety in the fear that "an unbearable misfortune had happened to her dear and tender husband." Of course, she would give, as the time of disappearance, the true hour of his death so that it corresponds with the statements of the forensic doctors, and also so that the two killers have time to forge alibis in hardened tungsten.

The project was deemed solid and even indestructible. The execution would take place the next Saturday, June 23, 1934, the second day of the summer season. One quickly becomes addicted to easy money, even when it is only fantasized. As a result, the crime would not stop at the father. After cashing in her \$8,000 or so she would have left, another project tickled the conspiracy theorists' gray matter. To this end, the affectionate, tender, delicious Tomasina, had suggested to her own son, the oldest one, to cover himself with a good life insurance for the benefit of his dear Italian Mama, that is to say *herself*.

She had two surviving sons out of the 14 she had given birth to. No no! Don't just imagine anything! They had all died in various ways quite confessable: accidents, postnatal diseases, brawls in some infamous alley of Montreal...

The project concerning the son was also debated at length, and the assassins had planned to send him to a Better World as soon as the turmoil caused by the death of Father Nicolas would be forgotten. The game was dangerous, but it was worth it. In any case, the members of this loving family were very convinced of this. Probably even in the mind of Mama Sarao, the young Angelo Donofrio, who was going to help with the task, also had a reserved and privileged place among the fallen angels, as indicated by his given name. This would avoid sharing the benefits. And so, he could not reveal the secret of crime and insurance fraud, like the architect builders of pyramids who had been carefully walled in a secret room that served as their eternal tomb.



But let us not anticipate. It still shows how precarious Angelo's situation was, because either the crime was not solved by Canadian Justice and the young man would possibly become the third victim of the conspiracy, or the murderers were unmasked, and Angelo Donofrio would be executed by Canadian Justice with the other conspirators. Without wishing to reveal the outcome of the enigma, which is no longer one, it was this second consequence that became part of the small Judicial History of Quebec and Canada.

No one knew precisely, except the murderers themselves, how the murder of the old man took place. Me Wilkie Proulx, attorney at the Bar of Montréal, who describes him in a long tirade kept at *the Public Archives of Canada*

in Ottawa¹¹, cannot be considered totally credible either since this description was intended to make the Court of Appeal believe that one of the murderers, Angelo Donofrio, was convinced that he was just participating in a robbery (or purse or wallet snatch)¹² and not in the assassination that the plotters had cooked up or simmered for months:

On Saturday evening, June 23rd, at 8:30 p.m., and on the instructions of the group of devious conspirators, "Donofrio, without making himself known, takes the same buses than Gagliardi and Sarao. He does not sit with them, does not talk to them and follows them discreetly to Snowdon where the three change trams to Cartierville. The trio goes down to the hippodrome Blue Bonnets and Donofrio always walks backwards without making themselves known. It was there, in Donofrio's mind, that the robbery was to be committed, but he did not have the courage to go any further, informed Gagliardi of his failure, and returned to Montreal in the same way.

The following Wednesday evening, Gagliardi and Donofrio meet again in a tram and there is still talk of the hold-up that Gagliardi wants to commit on Thursday night. In this interview, Gagliardi explains in particular to Donofrio that it is better not to use a revolver to rob the individual but that it would be better to hit him with a stick

¹¹ •Taken from the *Archives of Justice, Ottawa, Court of King's Bench, Criminal Jurisdiction on Appeal, The King against Angelo Donofrio, Factum of the Appellant*. By Me W. Proulx.

¹² •Hold-up in text.

to make him unconscious. Then, we had to pick his pockets, leave him there and run away" as quickly as possible.

On Thursday evening, "June 28th, around 6:30 a.m., Angelo Donofrio met Gagliardi as planned at the hippodrome and gave him a small stick (in fact a *bed footboard*), which Gagliardi hid in his golf pants. In the course of the evening, they met again at the corner of Rue Atwater in the same way, and made the same journey back to the fields of the Blue Bonnets where the trio entered a garage or hangar of the *Montréal Tramway*, which led to the Blue Bonnets Racetrack.

Gagliardi walked next to the old man Sarao, while Donofrio followed them from afar. Some distance from Boulevard Décarie, Donofrio suddenly saw Gagliardi retreat a few feet back from the old man, draw his bludgeon and hit several times Sarao on the back of the neck. But, still according to attorney Proulx who sought to water down the role and participation of his client for him avoid the gallows, Donofrio had presumed too much of his own determination.

"The moment Gagliardi began to beat the old man with repeated blows, Donofrio felt remorseful and feared that Gagliardi would take Sarao's life. He shouted at Gagliardi in defense of old Sarao. During the brawl between Donofrio and Gagliardi, the old man fell to the ground, and Donofrio, seeing the futility of his efforts [and also, no doubt, fearing that the killer's bludgeon turn against him,] fled as fast as possible. Gagliardi shouted at him to wait for him. At this moment, Donofrio turned around without stopping his crazy race and he saw

Gagliardi throwing something like a big rock (a big boulder) at Sarao's head. "If something happens, boy, fear not, I will put you in a dead end!" shouted Gagliardi.

Faced with the threat, "Donofrio was careful not to wait for the killer and continued his desperate escape, fearing that the same deadly fate would befall him. Gagliardi and Donofrio did not see each other again until the arrest" of Donofrio, the following Saturday evening.

This was the long description declaimed by attorney Proulx before the Court of Assizes to try to exonerate the young Angelo Donofrio (19 years old), a student of the Montréal Catholic High School, who finally only wanted to continue his studies at the Université de Montréal. True it was Angelo who provided Gagliardi with the baton, but it was only a "small stick or modest *bed footboard*". The latter further claimed to have tried to defend the victim against the killer. Me Proulx's arguments seemed, as is commonly said, obviously erroneous, that is to say visibly false.

In this Sicilian conspiracy, the only thing Angelo did not know was that his name was in third or fourth place, in the list of people to be terminated, probably for the sole purpose of not paying him the \$500 that was the price of his criminal complicity, (or to take it back in the event that the money had been already given). Murdering him would also prevent him from succumbing to the temptation to reveal to the police who had plotted and carried out the crime against old Sarao.



What really happened? We are reduced to conjecture. It seems that it was the lover Gagliardi who took old Sarao to the Montréal Hippodrome then named Blue Bonnets Racetrack. To lure him into this hunt, he gave him the excuse of a plausible story: a wealthy Montréal businessman had recruited them to carry out some gardening in the horticultural part of the racetrack. When Angelo Donofrio arrived at the scene to join Gagliardi who was escorting old Sarao to the place where it had been planned to put him to death, the two assassins realized with great embarrassment—and some relief—that neither of them had brought a weapon, which showed that both wanted to leave to his partner the take care of the killing. The crime had to be postponed. They explained to the overconfident old man that they had mistaken the date to carry out their work... gardening. Of course, the old man grumbled that he had been disturbed for nothing. Ah! He should have enjoyed so much this one-week grace period!

On Thursday, June 29th, the old man (the future victim) was, like an ox at the slaughterhouse, driven back to the racetrack for the same project and under the same pretext. Leone waited for a while with the old man on one of the delivery tracks that entered between the stables of the racecourse. Donofrio finally arrived with his weapon hidden under his jacket: a cradle foot that was to serve as his bludgeon. The presentation was quick as well as the execution which arrived without warning of course, immediately after the presentations, to the great astonishment of the victim who was totally and unexpectedly taken aback.

Such a killing probably evoked the marks of friendship of the Cosa Nostra's Godfathers who thus designate

the people to be slaughtered. Angelo suddenly began to hit Nicholas' skull with repeated blows. The old man, already very old, immediately lost consciousness and one of the two assassins finished him off with a large stone by smashing his skull. The body was then placed on a railway track so that a train could behead him. It was in this very concise way that the crime was accomplished, according to investigators from the *Sûreté du Québec*.

Once the crime had been committed, Gagliardi went to call his mistress Tomasina to tell her that she was finally a rich widow, that life was good, and that she should soon go and report the disappearance of her dear husband to the local police station.

The next day, 30th of June, Tomasina went to the nearest police station, composing her face "eaten away by worry", to declare the curious disappearance of her dear husband who had momentarily isolated himself in shrubbery bushes to relieve the excessive pressure of his old prostate. He had never returned. The police gently tried to reassure the inconsolable lady shaken by distressing sobs. They promised her that the impossible would be done to solve the riddle of this mysterious disappearance and find her beloved. Which, far from reassuring her, gave her cold sweats.

And so, it was. At eleven o'clock in the morning, the body of the disappeared was discovered by a private detective who was passing by: Olivier Deschamps. He showed perfect civic sense by immediately heading to the nearest police station, while another passer-by named Stefano (Steven) Brassens also saw the body and reported

it to the police. The body was immediately identified as that of Nicolas Sarao, an employee of the Montréal Highway Service.

Sergeant Ernest Francœur was given the task of solving this criminal riddle. He soon brought the body closer to Mrs. Sarao's declaration of disappearance. Tomasina had claimed that her husband had vanished in a different area, but witnesses who, the day before, were quite by chance at the scene "at the *presumed* hour of death", claimed that the old Sarao in question —whom they knew very well— had not shown himself in these places at the time of the curious disappearance declared by the widow.

Sergeant Francœur, who no doubt had a somewhat perverse mind, like all good investigators, wondered if the indecent age difference between the young wife and the murdered old husband had not played any role in his death. Is it not necessary to have a twisted mind to guess the motives of the conspirators and assassins, the only way to untie the Gordian Knot? The policeman immediately went to inquire at those who know in general... the gossips of ethnic communities.

The slanderers and other Sicilian gossips informed him illico of the almost daily presence of Leone Gagliardi at the Residence of the Sarao, rue de La Barre, as soon as the old husband was away. This last information suggested that Sergeant Francœur had raised a hare, a large fat hare. It was presumably a *Love Triangle*. Without wasting time, the policeman summoned Leone Gagliardi to ask him some pertinent but very indiscreet questions.

The interrogation immediately gave the expected good results. Panic-stricken, the lover revealed that the victim's wife, Tomasina Sarao and a young student Donofrio, were involved in the murder. The crime became a criminal conspiracy; today we would say, *a gang assassination* (un crime en réunion) terminology that seems to water down evil in order to partly absolve criminals. The lover even added that Tomasina and his old mother Giovanna had been harassing him for three good years so that he accepted to slaughter her husband, the old Nicolas.

In a jiffy, Sergeant Francœur's investigation was complete! The police officer immediately arrested the four accomplices and locked them up to keep them at the disposal of the *Coroner's Preliminary Inquest*. Donofrio himself was quick to confess his participation in the crime by softening his own actions with lies. However, that could not absolve him of all blame, but at least minimize his guilt in order to spare him the death penalty, the rope that terrorized the most robust spirits, like the *guillotine* in France, the *garrote* in Spain or the *head smashed in* by an elephant in India.

The file finally closed, the Deputy Coroner, Pierre Hébert, declared the four murderers criminally and collectively responsible for the death of Nicolas. Only the wife Tomasina clung desperately to her first lie like a falling mountaineer to his ice-piolet. Tirelessly, she repeated, without feeling the slightest grotesque, that on the afternoon of June 29th, while she was walking with her beloved husband near the Blue Bonnets hippodrome, her dear Nicolas had left her to relieve himself of a pressing need, behind a bush. She had waited for him for a long time, with

great patience, certain that her prostate was becoming more and more recalcitrant. He had not returned. She hadn't seen him since.

The circumstances of the assassination quickly became public through the powerful voices of the Montréal and then Canadian print media. Journalists began to call it *the Crime of the Blue Bonnet*, in reference to the name of the Montreal racetrack, at that time. In fact, the newspapers reported that it was difficult to find jurors who had not heard of the crime, as required by law and tradition, in order to ensure strict objectivity. Jurors had an absolute obligation to form an opinion solely on the basis of the evidence and testimonies provided in the Court of Assizes.



The magistrate who received the murder case was Judge Loranger. The Prosecutor Gérald Fauteux decided to delay the prosecution of the grandmother, the mother-in-law of the victim, Giovannia Téolis, who always feigned with genius to suffer from senility or dementia. She played her role of debility so well, that she probably was a little.

On the other hand, the other three conspirators were not only not going to escape Dame Justice, but, worse than anything, they would be tried altogether for conspiracy and *crime in gang*; and they were going to go "in a bundle", together, at wholesale price. It seemed that they were not worth going to the trouble of determining whether each of them really deserved the rope. Even the lover, Leone Gagliardi who had believed that, by his confession, he

would get away with it —not honorably but ingeniously—, he himself did not derive any benefit from his treason.

When asked to repeat before the jurors all the confessions he had made to the investigator of the Sûreté du Québec, the King's Prosecutor realized that Leone would not be so prolix. No doubt! At the request of his attorney, the murderer claimed that his confession had been illegally extracted from him by the police, who had coldly beaten him or deceived him with dishonest promises. They had promised him that if he confessed his guilt, he would receive a shorter and less ruthless sentence. Several policemen came to deny this blunder. According to them, the lover Leone had confessed spontaneously and without being unduly forced or treacherously induced.

In the end, Judge Loranger declared Gagliardi's confession admissible and brought in the jurors to "have him say" [old French: "*voir dire*"] The next day, Angelo Donofrio, was presented the young student who had participated in the murder to pay his school fees. As payment from his accomplices, he was himself destined to go and join his victim in the icy permafrost of the cemetery, because he was third in the list of casualties to be murdered. Now he had to face the gallows himself! His fate was worse than that of the other conspirators since. In any case, he would not escape the bed footboard of Tomasina Sarao, or the knife of his betrayed accomplices... or the gallows of Canadian Justice.

According to the advice of his Defense attorney, a Master in the subtle art of Deceit, the teenager also claimed that his confessions had been illegitimately

extorted by the police. But once again, Judge Loranger, unconcerned about Byzantine procrastination that would have hindered the smooth running of the trial, declared the confession, written and signed, admissible before the jurors. Mario Latroni, the lawyer of Tomasina Sarao, the fickle and whimsical wife, announced that he would not conduct any questioning or cross-examination of Tomasina during the trial (!).

Latroni did not produce any witnesses against the Prosecution or in favor of the Defense. One wonders in this case why this attorney —thief¹³, scoundrel or incompetent— had agreed to occupy the function of Official Defender of this accused, if it was to let her hang without raising the slightest recrimination. Depending on whether we are powerful or miserable, that is to say rich or poor, we will be well or poorly defended! Her husband's life insurance would certainly have allowed her to hire the services of a quality lawyer —that is, a lawyer capable of exonerating a culprit—but Tomasina could only receive the premium if she were found innocent!

At the end of all these legal pugilats, irritating counter-attacks, bullfighting estocades and perverse lies, it was necessary to move on to the deliberations of the jurors who were losing their Latin in this imbroglio of deceit. Paradoxically, the case unexpectedly appeared very clear to them; so clear that in thirty-five short minutes, the jurors agreed on a general verdict of guilt against the three accused, without even recommending *Clemency* for either of

¹³ •Curiously this Italian name means *thief* in Latin. Admittedly, one is not responsible for one's ancestors but this detail deserved to be mentioned.

them, despite the fact that the four accomplices had enough to plead the mitigating circumstances¹⁴: the wife Tomasina Sarao had been married, still a minor, to a mature man. Student Angelo Donofrio claimed to be unaware that this was a crime and not just a robbery. In addition, he was only a teenager who wanted to pay the cost of his education, and who, furthermore, was likely to be murdered as a thank you. For his part, Leone Gagliardi, the lover, had spilled the beans; it was well worth some recognition.

As for the old grandmother, she had clear ideas only to pray to the Madonna of Polsi and to cook spaghetti *à la Calabraise*, which was none other than the Chinese recipe reported by Marco Polo on his return from the Far East¹⁵. So, all of them could save their heads. But unfortunately, this was not the case! The attorneys, poorly paid, defended them as if they had not been paid at all. The judge then read the death sentences prepared in advance. The three accomplices would be hanged by the neck until death ensued, in the prison of Bordeaux, on the date of January 18th, 1935.

In addressing the wife, the judge was extremely harsh, "because," he said, "*you were not only the instigator of the crime, but you maintained the project for several months while showing your husband a loving and caring wife's face.*" In uttering these harsh words followed by the death sentence, the judge made a grimace of disgust, without wondering what would have happened to this poor woman if she had wanted to snatch the divorce from her

¹⁴ Extenuating circumstances (circonstances atténuantes).

¹⁵ •It was the Chinese who were at the origin of this Italian cultural trait.

husband soaked in archaic and outdated marital customs. No doubt, it is she who would probably have been found dead, because in these backward regions where medieval traditions impose tyranny on females, women must necessarily be hypocritical and chafouin to exist by themselves and live some of their dreams. Even if they were immoral! But it is clear that in this case, she had pushed a little too far her taste for Freedom.

The date of the killing was later postponed to March 29th, 1935, nine months almost after the assassination. Indeed, the various lawyers still appealed against the death sentence for formal defect, technical errors or whatever.... According to them, the initial confessions of the two main defendants had been allegedly extracted by the police by means of tricks, ill-treatment or even torture. Moreover, these confessions had been presented to the jurors as the most serious evidence when they should have remained under the bushel so as not to influence their verdict.

Unfortunately for the Defendants, the Appeals were rejected one after the other, as so many Venetian draperies and curtains that fade away to finally reveal the appalling image of the scaffold. Ah! If they had been able to *rewind the time* to erase these months of secret talks and all these projects of freedom and wealth. What dreamer has not been lulled by fantasies of fortune? One has the tenacious but totally false impression that money is the key to Happiness. The death of the old man had become only a kind of almost insignificant detail to realize in a jiffy all these dreamlike fantasies.



Mrs. Sarao awaited execution at the Women's Prison on Fulham Street. The night before their deaths, the three inmates were transferred to the double cell of the death row in Bordeaux prison. One of these two cells was transformed into a chapel. This "suite" which was rented neither by the month nor by the week opened directly on the balcony-scaffold pierced by two large metal hatches and surmounted by a steel canopy equipped with two shiny hooks, as can be seen on the cover of this book.

The mutinous and resentful Destiny would doubly avenge her old husband because the young Tomasina was executed by a man of the same age. The 71-year-old English executioner, who hid under the pseudonym Arthur Ellis, was given the lucrative task of execution. At the metal stem beam that dominated the terrible balcony, under the metal skirt of the marquise¹⁶, the two men Gagliardi and Donofrio were first to be hanged simultaneously.

Then, in a macabre procession, Tomasina and another convict of Italian origin, Joseph Alisaro, who had martyred his fiancée Graziella Viens, would follow successively. Ellis was an executioner of the Victorian era, and he pushed Morality and Virtue to the point of separating the sexes even on the scaffold! Alisaro¹⁷ faints in his backroom when he hears the slamming of the executions of the other three convicts. Luckily for him, he had just obtained, during his fainting, a temporary adjournment of

¹⁶ Under the metal canopy of the small roof.

¹⁷ Donofrio's distant cousin. Everyone was more or less cousin in the Italian community of Montréal.

one month to give time to his Appeal. So, English hanged only the three accomplices that morning.



Arriving at the Bordeaux prison in an advanced state of inebriation *as usual*, as if he wanted to feed daily the cirrhosis that devoured his life slowly and would cost him a forced retirement, the executioner spent part of the afternoon oiling the metal mechanisms, then testing them with sandbags on the hatches... for hours on end, to the point of driving crazy the hundreds of inmates who could see the show through their bars.

Having done so, he wanted to weigh the three convicts in order to calculate the length of rope needed. He went to see Donofrio and Gagliardi, but when he wanted to enter Tomasina Sarao's cell in the women's quarters, he was denied access, probably because he was totally drunk. He was simply given by the warden a piece of paper on which the weight of the convict had been scribbled at the time of her incarceration, such as noted in the criminal record. He therefore calculated the length of the rope from this erroneous figure, without suspecting that this professional error would not only mark the end of his career but also put an end to the performances in front of the general public.

When the supreme moment of execution arrived, English went to find the two men who were to die together. He tied their arms and took them through the door of the cell directly onto the balcony-scaffold, whose two metal hatches allowed for simultaneous double execution.

Deeply moved, Gagliardi stumbled several times while taking his last steps towards death. Ah! He must have regretted then to have had the naivety to believe that by denouncing his accomplices, he himself would be spared! Chinese philosophers have warned humans that *a secret remains our slave as long as it is kept well locked up. If we open the cage to let it fly away, it will be our turn to become its slave.*

Not only did Gagliardi not benefit from his betrayal, but he now had to add the contempt of all Montrealers. The teenager Donofrio managed to keep a firm and determined step. However, the execution of the two men was not a professional success for the executioner who had forgotten that the numbers are like Love, it is not as faithful when mixed with alcohol. The executioner's erroneous calculations had led him to believe that the shock would break the vertebrae of the convicts and kill them instantly. In fact, both died by simple strangulation. Under the effect of extreme emotion, the intestines of the condemned emptied in one block into their trousers. This phenomenon was very common in the execution of convicts.

Leaving the gallows, the executioner English, dismayed by his double failure, which augured badly for the third execution, returned to the cell of the condemned to death now occupied by Madame Sarao. But his state of drunkenness did not allow him to note an important detail that would complete his misfortune. When she was incarcerated, the young and thin Tomasina who wanted to please her young lover, weighed only 65.7 kg. Her weight had been recorded in her personal file.

As he led Tomasina to the fatal balcony, the executioner did not realize that her body had become 20 kg overweight during his stay in cell. To whom would she have sought to please by keeping her slim figure? It reached almost 85 kg. The kitchen of the Penitentiary Services had benefited her. The heavy blood alcohol level of the hangman prevented him from distinguishing the slightest difference. He therefore neglected to shorten the rope and adapt it using the *long jump formula*¹⁸.

Tomasina was therefore invited to cross the threshold of the French window to the metal gallows. It was the 31st anniversary of her marriage to Nicolas Sarao. Perhaps she thought about it while waiting for death. This ceremony had been accomplished in southern Italy, 31 springs earlier. The bride was tenderly 15 years old, and an immaculate white veil covered her long black hair to indicate that her Virtue remained intact and untouched, like a *security seal* invented by the Creator to safeguard the Honor of her own family and to reassure the man who would choose this teenager, and marry her.

This old tradition of virginity was one of the few rituals that had survived Islamic customs: Just after the "consumption", the mother-in-law appeared in the bridal room to grab the blood-stained sheet from the torn hymen and to brandish it in front of the delighted guests. If by chance, the damn hymen refused to bleed and to proclaim the full virginity of the teenage wife, the mother-in-law discreetly hastened to twist the neck of a poultry so that its blood

¹⁸ •The calculation was as follows: 1020 divided by the weight of the condemned in pounds from which 14 was subtracted for the weight of the head. The quotient of the division gave the length of the rope in feet.

would testify in the eyes of all to the Virtue and Honor of the young girl and of both families. Thus, the blood of the old hen would replace that of the young woman, as the blood of the old goat had replaced before God the blood of baby Isaac under the sacrificial knife of Abraham.

Next to little Tomasina, all fragile in her feminity, stood the young and robust Nicolas Sarao aged 27. She was so proud and happy to marry him. So shaky too. Ah! If time could go back, rewind and reset!

From the top of her gloomy balcony-scaffold, the same Tomasina may have chased these memories of happiness out of her tortured mind to prepare to die. She stood still while a small ceremony took place on her left, in one of the two small balconies that framed the gallows. One of these mini balconies was occupied by the hangman and the other by the prison chaplain. The latter made her kiss a silver crucifix, while the executioner was about to crush with his foot the trigger piston.

Each executioner had his habits, his manias, his delusions. One of them¹⁹, for example used to point his finger in a distant direction when the hatch opened to distract the attention of the spectators and prevent them from grasping the precise moment of the fall into the hatch. Petty revenge of a frustrated man!

English, exalted by the spirit —the spirit-of-wine more than the Holy Spirit— wanted to play the moralizing-director-of-conscience. Taking the cavernous voice of the Almighty God, he advised the tortured woman to

¹⁹ •Camille Branchaud, from Québec.

confess to her horrible crime before she died. Was it to relieve himself of guilt for having put to death several hundred human beings during his career, which was coming to an end? That is to say ten times more than the worst mass murderer! For any answer to his incongruous question that had no reason to exist, Tomasina only smiled in a completely enigmatic way. Then the executioner, upset or disappointed, suddenly put on his black hood and smashed, with a furious kick, the plunger of the hatch, as if he wanted to make her pay for her casualness and disobedience towards him by sending her faster to hell.

Perhaps he thought that her refusal of repentance damned her? But this time again the hanging did not go as planned. It was he who went in Hell and not her. *The sprinkler was sprinkled.* Tomasina would unwittingly take revenge for the hangman's exasperation against her. In a split second and in a dry snap like an artillery blast, Tomasina's head was torn from her body in a cloud of blood that fell back in rain on the audience sitting downstairs. Both parts of the body crashed down the stairs below. Everyone, the executioner and the chaplain, the walls and the gallows were widely splattered with blood, including the two inmates who waited downstairs to place the body in the coffin, not to mention the spectators in the front rows.



The embarrassment, caused by this sinister and repugnant beheading, and the rain of blood which defiled the anguished and disgusting audience, cast consternation on all Canadians; both *opponents*, who found these hangings contrary to the rules of Christianity, and *partisans* who

believed that this horror was part of God's plans to keep the flock of faithful sheep in the Holy Path of the Lord. The latter feared that the scandal perpetrated by the executioner English, very disappointed, would give weapons to the abolitionists.

Obviously, the overweight taken by the lady during her stay in prison meant shortening the rope! The Canadian authorities immediately tried to conceal the horror and error in the hope that they would not reach the ears of the abolitionists. An attempt was made to force Tomasina's two sons, who had requested the body, to keep the horrible beheading secret. The authorities forced them to proceed discreetly with the burial and to completely proscribe any photo that could have revealed the magnitude and horror of the tragedy.

The Coroner's Jury, for its part, was forced to note with dismay that the law had not been respected: despite the sentence of *hanging*, the young woman had been *beheaded*. It was illegal, and the mistake remained irreparable. However, in order not to add fuel to the fire of public opinion, no vituperation, no blame, no grievance, was raised. Yet, despite the supreme efforts of the Authorities to hide this unforgivable error, the news broke through the thick wall of the omerta the same day.

Mario E. Latroni, Mrs. Sarao's attorney who had defended her so badly, filed an official protest with the Ministry of Justice: "There is no reason on earth for such a thing to happen!" said Latroni, referring to the shocking execution he had witnessed: "It was horrible to see that by

falling into the void her head had been completely torn from her body."

Correctional Services Officer Duguay added in his Memoirs a curious detail: She "had her head torn off with a dry blow and her enormous body fell heavily to the ground. All the internal organs sprang like straw from an old mattress punctured by *wear and tear*²⁰." Was this the sad truth? Or the author simply sought to bloat with repugnant details the horror of this execution, to bewitch, to fascinate even more the mind of a jaded public?



The scandal was immense and marked the end of the long and terrible career of Arthur Bartholomew English, *a.k.a.* Arthur Ellis, as *Executor of the High Works of the Dominion of Canada*, that is, in his function as *Nocher of the Underworld*. He was now boycotted by all the sheriffs of all the county prisons in Canada, and thus found himself forced to retire in anonymity with the \$50,000 of his patrimony that would quickly dissolve in the vapors of alcohol. He was 71 years old.

This final accident of Tomasina Sarao had not been the only one of Arthur English's career; far from it. Marc-René de Cotret, the journalist who reported these facts in **LA PATRIE** had witnessed a quadruple execution that had really shaken the nerves of this hangman and his own. "It was the execution of Morel, Serafini, Gambino and Frank. Ellis was nervous. We knew that. We had spent the night

²⁰ •Duguay, 1979, p.49. This event was reminiscent of that of William the Conqueror. Too big to fit in the coffin that had been prepared for him, the body of this king of England, forced into the coffin, ends up exploding, releasing a terrible smell.

in the prison and talked with him. An extraordinary strain then weighed on the entire prison. The first two who were executed together were Morel and Gambino. It is known that Gambino had a nervous breakdown, under the rope itself. He collapsed dead. He was hanged anyway, while Morel recited in a loud and vibrant voice, in the darkness of that early October morning, the Prayers of the Dead in the company of the chaplain."

"Being freed from the prison of his body,
may he be admitted into the glory
of your heavenly kingdom:
through the grace and the merits
of our Lord, Jesus Christ, who with you
and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns
for ever and ever. Amen"

With a falsely relaxed look, the hangman then advanced the next two inmates in this kind of death painting that could have served as a framework for a Francisco de Goya horror painting or a Shakespearean tragedy. Curiously, the hangman then began to whistle a fashionable tune as if to calm his own nervous panic. *"Frank was screaming in fear; Serafini remained calm. The hangman was no longer calm at all. And he got the rope wrong. So, Frank who was a giant next to little Serafini came close to have the fate of the Sarao woman. His neck had lengthened by several inches. I saw him. True, English realized his mistake, but he pretended to ignore it. He let them die in other sufferings. He waited, whistling."*

Such was this man, English-Ellis, who died in total solitude, abandoned, and despised by all and especially by

himself because, as Pier Paolo Pasolini said²¹: "*The fate of the hangman is traced to them by the gaze of their victims*", a terrorized look, surpassed only in terror by the gaze of those whom these criminals had themselves murdered.



Donofrio's body was collected by his brother James who, for hours, watched outside the walls of the star-shaped prison, waiting for the black flag to rise to the mast on the dome, and for the prison bells to announce to all that the rope had done its work of death. A reporter for the **TORONTO GLOBE**, the forerunner of today's **GLOBE & MAIL**, wrote on Saturday, March 30th, of the executions:

"Gagliardi's body was not claimed tonight. A distant relative seems to have to come from New York tomorrow to pick him up. If it is not claimed, it will be buried in the *Potter's Field*, that is to say in *the square of the poor*, an allusion to *the thirty denarii of Judas* which were used to buy a field to bury the destitute without family", when the famous traitor of the Bible, tapped by regrets, returned the 30 gold shekels of his betrayal to the President of the *Tribunal of Sanhedrin*.

Tomasina's decapitated body was taken in by her two sons, the only survivors of the 14 children she had given birth to during her 31 year marriage. The others had died younger. It was the one to whom she had taken out comfortable life insurance for her own benefit, with the

²¹ •Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) was a poet, Italian writer, journalist, philosopher, screenwriter, murdered one night on a beach in Osti, during a gay meeting. He was openly gay at a time when discrimination was ruthlessly strong and virulent. But to be fair, it is unclear whether he was murdered by a homophobe or by a spurned lover.

diabolical plan of having him murdered too, who sadly claimed her body to pay her the last honors due to an Italian Mama. The trial had taught him the horrible truth.

And what happened to the fourth conspirator, Tomasina's old mother, Madame Giovanna Téolis who was in the canonical age of the executioner (71 years old)? Playing "*Lady Gaga*" and pleading guilty to a simple charge of homicide, she avoided the rope and received only 20 years of penitentiary which she served in Kingston, formerly Fort Frontenac. This was more than enough at his venerable age; she died there.



A detail to finish; on July 22nd, 1938, the Montréal newspaper **LA PATRIE** announced that the former executioner Arthur Bartholomew English, alias Arthur Ellis, had just died at the Hôpital Sainte-Jeanne d'Arc²² the night before, on the 21st, after a long coma. Some rumors suggested suicide. But isn't alcoholism a suicide in itself? All the more so since, according to the same newspaper, English's resources were totally exhausted. He could not even have paid the modest pension of \$35 a month to his wife who had left him in 1932, six years earlier.

In three years he had squandered to the last penny the \$50,000 he had accumulated at the moment of his layoff in 1935. It was a considerable fortune, but *Monsieur de Bordeaux* (as he called himself, not to evoke his taste for the good wine of the same name but to allude to the

²² •The dechristianization of Quebec led to the change of name of this Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc hospital to The Guy-Laporte Hospital Center.

name of the Montreal prison where he had so often exercised his unorthodox profession) had lived on too big a foot: \$1,388.88 per month (55 times the minimum wage of the time²³), granting only \$35.⁰⁰ per month to his wife.

Having exhausted everything, he fell into deep ethyl depression and even more deadly suicidal alcoholism. He lived his last weeks in squalid hotel rooms, having no fixed home for fear of the vengeful hostility of the public.



STRANGE DOUBLE LIFE OF MR. ELLIS, HANGMAN.

Respected Canadian Political Figure to His Friend, But Executioner to the State Until His Wife Discovered His Jekyll-Hyde Life and Left Him. Then He Bungled His Work, Lost His Job and Has Just Died in Want²⁴.

Arthur Bartholomew English (Hangman Ellis), former British Army Officer Who Was Canada's *Lord High Executioner* for Years Without Anybody, Not Even His Wife, Suspecting It.

Montreal, August 25, 1938.

Canada's most mysterious and real Jekyll-Hyde character has just died here without explaining himself. He was Arthur Ellis, hangman. A British Army captain whose

²³ •The unofficial minimum wage in Canada was then about \$0.20 per hour, or a monthly wage of \$25 to \$30. Today, the Canadian minimum wage being \$1600.00, Ellis who spent 55 times the minimum wage was therefore spending the equivalent of \$88,000.00 per month. 55 times the monthly minimum wage in France (2021) would represent over €67,000 per month.

²⁴ Copyright 1958, by American Weekly, Inc. Great Britain Rights Reserved.

real name was Arthur Bartholomew English, he had tossed away a brilliant record and high prospects, given up relatives, friends, and finally lost even his wife in order to carry on his strange profession as an executioner. He was a good one at first—successfully hanging 549 persons, including one man who was already dead, but his 550th "case" was a woman, and her head came off. This cost Ellis the job for which he has sacrificed everything, and the other day he was found dying of starvation.

Since the days when Robert Louis Stevenson wrote his famous story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—that weird character who was a kindly physician in the daytime and a fiendish murderer at night—psychologists have learned a lot about the curious mental phenomenon known as dual personality. But there have been few real cases more striking than that of Hangman Ellis, who managed to lead two entirely different lives for twenty years, keeping the two contrasting sides of his nature so thoroughly separated that for a long time not even his wife suspected his official identity.

When she did discover it, about seven years ago, learning for the first time that she was married to a hangman, she was so horrified she left him and would never live with him again. And there are some people who say that this unhappy separation was what first started the executioner's hand to faltering—gradually wearing down his iron nerve until he lost his skill and bungled a job so frightfully his career was ended.

At best, his occupation must have been a severe strain on his nerves—even though it seems to have

fascinated him. And somehow or other —his friends now say—the necessary willpower and mental discipline to carry on his disagreeable work was derived from the quiet, contented home life provided by his wife, who all that time was utterly unaware of his work.

Year after year, she knew him only as Captain Arthur Bartholomew English, who had moved to Canada shortly after retiring from the British Army, married her and settles down to lead the placid life of a country gentleman in a suburb of Montréal, where his chief interest besides herself seemed to be his unusually fine flower garden. Neither neighbor had the slightest idea as to his real reason for moving to Canada.

But now they know.

He left England because he wanted to be a hangman and because that unpopular post in Canada was offered to him. As to why he wanted to be an executioner, that is another question.

His career in the army was a distinguished one. He served under Lord Kitchener in Egypt, and under the celebrated General Roberts during the Boer War, later passing through the World War with an enviable record. The son of a country gentleman, he was well-educated and had many friends and influential family connections throughout England —so on his retirement from the army there was every reason for him to find the life of his own people altogether pleasant and satisfactory.

But evidently, he didn't. Instead, he began to develop a morbid interest in prisons and executions, and it is

said that the incident, which eventually started him out on his new career and likewise gave him his new name, was the hanging of Mrs. Edith Jessie Thompson, who was condemned to death for the murder of her husband in London. At the last moment, Mrs. Thompson's nerve failed, and she fainted just as she was being led from her cell. So, she had to be carried to the gallows in a chair and hanged while still half conscious. Witnessing that distressing scene in the yard at Holloway Jail, Captain English was so impressed by the expert way the work was done by John Ellis, England's official executioner, that he decided right then and there that he also would be a hangman.

Sometime after that, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Premier of Canada, wrote to England for an efficient executioner, since native Canadians did not seem to have the experience or the liking for this occupation. Hearing of the opening, Captain English applied for it under the name of Arthur Ellis, apparently having adopted that name because of his admiration for England's famous hangman. He moved to Québec and began his double life.

Time after time, he would leave his wife in the little country home he had bought near Montréal, explaining that he was going on a "political mission". And as Arthur Ellis, he traveled all over the Dominion, playing the angel of death.

For his labors in the Province of Québec he was, after a while, placed on a fixed salary, but outside the Province he held no official position as executioner and was merely called in when there was a job to be done, receiving from \$150 to \$250.

In Canada not much is printed about executions, and it is against the law to take pictures of them. This, and the fact that Ellis carried on a long and unusually successful game of hide-and-seek with photographers, helped him to conceal his identity from the public. Then, just when some of the neighbors were beginning to wonder at his periods of leisure and intermittent "political" journeys, there came proof that he really was interested in politics.

The late Sir Lomer Gouin, struck by the captain's persuasive talking ability, made him political organizer during his campaign for Premiership of the Province of Québec. Later when Sir Lomer became Minister of the Dominion Government, his former organizer called on him.

"Since you have now been appointed Minister of Justice," Ellis said, "I would appreciate it if you could have my position made an official one." Sir Lomer looked puzzled. "I do not see how that could be done," he replied. "After all, it would not be possible to make *Political Organizer* an official position."

The captain then somewhat diffidently explained that he was also Arthur Ellis, the executioner, and that he would like that position made official for the entire Dominion. Sir Lomer's jaw dropped in dismay. He declined to discuss the matter further.

No one knows just how the hangman's wife found out about his double life. Along with virtually every other newspaper reader in Canada, she must have often seen the name of Arthur Ellis in print, but there was never anything

in those accounts to betray that he was her devoted husband.

So perhaps she became suspicious after a while about those frequent and mysterious trips, on which she was never taken. Perhaps she began to fear that there was some other woman in his life—for doubtless he was always moody for some time before one of those trips and also afterwards. However, many executioners are attracted to their work and fascinated by it, many of the modern ones also dread it – and often pass through periods of despondency both before and after an affair on the scaffold. Perhaps she shadowed him right up to the door of some Canadian prison and heard someone point him out as "that fellow, Ellis, the hangman."

At any rate, she did find out the truth and she did leave him – and from that day on the hangman was a changed man.

He began to drink more than was good for him—after each execution. Each time, after the hearse and the portable blood-red scaffold he himself had designed had been dismantled, under his supervision, and packed up for shipment back to Montréal, he would return to his lonely hotel room and drink himself into a stupor.

Stevenson's Mr. Hyde used some mysterious drug in shifting back and forth from one personality to another – and perhaps when the hangman was soaking himself with whiskey he was trying to wash away, or burn out, a side of his nature he detested—and thus recover the personality of the genial Captain English.

While in the midst of one of these post-execution drinking bouts, he rarely appeared in public. But once he did,—and the people who were present on that occasion will not forget it. That was the night, when a road show company was presenting an outstanding Broadway success in Montréal. Ellis, the hangman, rented a box and sat in it all by himself. Half-way through the performance he sat there, straight as a ramrod, a pale, gaunt symbol of death, who must have given an uneasy feeling to both the audience and the actors. Then, without warning, he leaped up, whipped out a revolver and started shooting out the footlights—and it took half a dozen men to subdue him.

But he was still a good executioner. Nerves of steel like his, can handle a lot of stress. For instance, on one occasion he had to hang four murderers, Franck, Morel, Scrafini and Valentino, who had murdered a bank messenger,

Frank went first—then Morel. And for one of the other two—no one except prison officials know which it was—the sight was too horrible to be borne. As this one reached the top of the scaffold, over he toppled in what seemed to be a faint. Quick as a flash, Ellis bent over, felt his heart and realized that the terrified murderer had died of heart failure. But the hangman said nothing—with the aid of his assistant, he held the body over the trap, adjusted the noose and hanged a man already dead.

Not long afterwards, the man whose name he had borrowed, John Ellis, England's hangman, committed suicide, haunted by all the dreadful scenes in which he had taken such a conspicuous part—and no doubt this had a

very bad effect on Arthur Ellis. At any rate, as the time approached for Canada's next mass execution, prison authorities noticed that the iron-willed hangman was in a peculiar state of mind—for him. Half the time he did not seem to hear what was being said to him and would jump like a frightened bride at the least little noise.

One of the victims on this occasion was to be a woman—but that couldn't be the cause of Ellis' nervousness. The idea of hanging a woman had never disturbed him. In fact, it has been reported that he disapproved some ears ago when the sentence of Doris Palmer McDonald, who was to have been one of his victims, was commuted to life imprisonment. Along with her husband, who was later executed, Doris had taken part in a robbery and a murder—and the hangman, always a strong upholder of law and order, saw no reason why she should receive executive clemency.

But, whatever the cause of his mental distress, it is a fact that he was not his old self on the bleak morning when next called upon to perform his duty—sending to their deaths Leone Gagliardi, Angelo Donofrino and Mrs. Tomasina Sarao, who had made a pretty job of murdering the unfortunate Mr. Carao [Sarao] for his life insurance. This time Ellis hanged the two men back-to-back, at the same moment, but in placing the noose around the woman's neck he seemed unusually slow and apparently fumbled. The next moment, when he sprung the trap, her head was jerked clean off and rolled across the prison yard.

In vain he pleaded that the prison authorities had refused his customary visit to the death cell just before the

execution and had given him the woman's weight as it was when she entered the prison, forgetting to tell him that she had since gained thirty pounds. So he had given her too much rope—and after 549 perfect hangings, he lost his job on the grounds that he was a bungler.

For a while he dropped out of sight, and then just the other day he was discovered, at the age of seventy-two, in the last stages of starvation in a lodging house garret. He was taken to a hospital—but too late to save his life. His wife, however, heard of his plight and hurried to his side, in time to save him from a pauper's grave."



Russian Roulette

The Elizabeth Anne Tilford Murder Case, 1935

The singer Pierre-Jean Vaillard, who rests in peace today in the cemetery of Montmartre, not far from the great French executioners¹ and a host of celebrities², liked to say with a smile: "Beware of people who are said to have their hearts open. Ask yourself what they can have in their chest, instead of their heart!" Did he say this to excuse his own selfishness or for any other reason? What is certain is that, if he had known Elizabeth-Anne Tilford, he would have taken her as the very archetype of his aphorism. She displayed a most angelic face and a completely virtuous attitude in her Salvationist parish³. Every week she taught Sunday catechism⁴. She also took care of the local troop of the Salvationist Guides and climbed the hierarchy of her celestial army to the rank of captain. A true *praying mantis*, she constantly demonstrated a pious and even devout attitude. No one could have imagined that when she joined hands —as the *praying mantis* seem to do, with their front legs of nuns in prayer— she was actually watching for her prey! With it, the conjugal copulation is revealed as dangerous as Russian roulette since it only

¹ • The Sanson, whose family coat of arms included a cracked bell (without sound).

² • Among others, Jean-Claude Brialy, Dalida, Clouzot, Degas, Alexandre Dumas fils, Feydeau, Fragonard, Théophile Gauthier, les Goncourt, Guity, Offenbach, Madame Récamier, Zola, Stendhal, Horace Vernet, Alfred de Vigny, and finally, the most amazing character: Antoine -Hippolite Cros, former king of Auricania and Patagonia.

³ • *Salvationist* is the adjective from the compound noun: Salvation Army.

⁴ •Sunday-school.

reached the vital orgasm by killing its male. Moreover, the Acadians and their sons, the Cajuns, rightly call this insect the Devil's Horse.



On October 3rd, 1935, the Ottawa people could read in **LE DROIT D'OTTAWA** and the **OTTAWA JOURNAL**: "Woodstock: Peine de mort pour Mme Tilford" et "Death penalty for a woman in Woodstock. Mrs. Tilford will be hanged on December 17th, for killing her husband." Those who had attended the Sessions of the Supreme Court of Assizes could recount that the accused Elizabeth-Anne Tilford, 56, began to scream when she heard her death sentence pronounced by Judge A.C. Kingstone:

— It's not right, Your Lordship! Your Lordship is not right, she cried out in the top of her voice. I was trapped! If at least I had been given the chance to present my evidence. I was fooled! Absolutely! May God have mercy on the souls of the Tilfords!

Her last sentence, which had preceded an understandable fainting, manifested the mystical and exalted breath of her personality; a spiritual breath that she had exploited quite a bit during her life. She was accused of poisoning her third husband, Tyrrell Tilford, an almost young man of 36 years⁵. The criminal investigation showed that she had probably suppressed her previous two husbands as well. For the third, the one who finally led her to the scaffold, the jury deliberated for six long hours, while

⁵ •Tyrrell Tilford was born on 10 November 1899 in Shardlow, Derbyshire, England. He was the penultimate of 15 children born to James William Tilford and Mary Butcher.

hundreds of hostile demonstrators massed in the court-room and accessed corridors.

By 8:30 p.m., the jury had finally completed its deliberations and reached a verdict. Mrs. Tilford, certain to get away with this murder too, had rushed into the large courtroom and joined her place on the arm of her son Norman Walker, born of her second marriage. Some people are so imbued with their intelligence and *power of control* that they think they are inaccessible to the rigors of the law. She was escorted by Police Officer Clark of the Ontario Provincial Police. Clerk Peter McDonald asked the President of the Jury the ritual question.

"GUILTY!"

simply replied the jury's president. At this word that sent her to death, a very low moan, a kind of roar of a wounded wild animal came out of Mrs. Tilford's throat. It was like a heartbreaker that this thorny news was making by vibrating on the tiny isotopes of her vocal cords. Then, according to tradition, the judge congratulated the jurors to relieve the conscience of the most scrupulous, those who would feel guilty in sending a human being to death; a person who may have been innocent, who knows? This happens every day in the tens of thousands of Courts of Justice that dotted the 58 independent countries in 1935⁶.

The judge then turned to Ms. Tilford to assure her that she had had a fair and just trial, and that she had been adequately defended. Well defended? The Honorable

⁶ •In 2015. the number of independent countries recognized by the UN is 194, not counting Taiwan and the Vatican which, although independent, are not members of the UN. About fifty continental or island territories may one day be added to these numbers.

Judge must have been dreaming during the Proceedings! The Defense had not called *any* witnesses, not even the accused herself. It was just like if her attorney secretly wanted her dead. As an explanation for this unforgivable omission, the lawyer had given an excuse that sounded very much like *nonsense*: "*I would not dare try to pull that woman through that wild morass of accusations because innocent as one may be, you could not hope to do it*"⁷. In other words: No need to defend yourself, the accusers are too mean!

After curiously telling Ms. Tilford this strange paradox: that she had been very well defended, the judge read the death sentence, under the most vehement protests of Elizabeth-Anne Tilford.



But what was the existential background of this woman with such a tragic fate, and what were the bad choices in her life that brought her before this intransigent Court of Justice? Because it is almost always our successive bad decisions that ruin our chances of happiness.

Elizabeth-Anne Tilford was born in England in 1885. At the tender age of 15, she had married the handsome Frank Fred Yaxley. It was a time when marriage was considered eternal and sacred by young boys and especially by young girls in Western Europe, because divorce did not yet allow couples to break it without undergoing the pitfalls of a real "obstacle course".

⁷ •*Public Archives of Canada*, Ottawa. *Criminal Record RG 13*, Vol. 1598, Vol. 1599, File CC 437; 1935. Elizabeth-Anne Tilford.

Probably less mystical and devout than the other young girls of her generation, Elizabeth-Anne had—as the investigation revealed—married Frank Yaxley by challenge, to win against her friends the bet of putting the rope around the neck of this most coveted Casanova in the city and even in the county.

She won her bet, under the jealous gaze of her rivals, but then found herself married to a man she did not really love, and immediately invited to play in his bed a role she probably did not want. After the first love impetuosity followed by forced simulations and then stubborn migraines, the desire to break these chains of conjugal duty became irresistible. Elizabeth-Anne then seems to have imagined a completely casual way of circumventing the Byzantine procedures of divorce, too expensive for her limited means⁸.

As a result, Yaxley, "the heartbreaker", died in mysterious conditions not very long after his marriage. This indifference to human life (of others) did not prevent Elizabeth-Anne from displaying a face of the most angelic, the most virtuous, in her religious community. Asked about the fate of this first husband, by the Canadian investigator W.W. Watson, during the final investigation that led her to the gallows, Mrs. Tilford told him that Yaxley, her first husband, was still alive. To others around her, she had

⁸ •Before 1857 and even after, divorce was governed in England by the Anglican Church. Only the rich could then divorce because the fees were huge to obtain an official annulment from the hand of the king or queen. Those who were not fortunate enough to be Anglicans had to obtain a private law of Parliament, a law in due form. The state wanted to burden all the non-conformist diehards and ransom them.

certified that he had died⁹. After a long period of common-law union (the fate of successive concubines could never be established with any certainty) she married her 32 year-old cousin William Walker in 1911 at the age of 26. He was a sergeant-major in the Salvation Army, but seemed very talented by other means¹⁰ as spirituality and love, since he fathered nine children with Elizabeth-Anne.

In 1928, when the world economic crisis broke out, England resumed a long tradition, briefly interrupted during the Great War¹¹, of getting rid of its poor who were again shipped to Canada and Australia. The Walker couple were invited to emigrate to Maria Chapdelaine's country. They came to live in Woodstock, Ontario. The Salvation Army provided shelter and food for the couple and for their children upon disembarkation and for a number of weeks. But this did not last and poverty invited itself again and became embedded in this family of immigrants.

Misery is never conducive to good marital relationship. This couple was the shining proof of this. It was then that Elizabeth-Anne's husband —the second— was afflicted with a mysterious ailment that an ignorant and incompetent doctor attributed to a brain tumor. On February 19th, 1929, William Walker died and was soon buried in Woodstock Baptist Cemetery. Elizabeth-Anne regained

⁹ •Criminal Record RG 13, Vol. 1598, Vol. 1599, File CC 437. National Archives (Justice), Elizabeth-Anne Tilford, Ottawa.

¹⁰ •Ibidem.

¹¹ •As England refused to establish universal Conscription on its population—despite the insistent and constant pressures of the French who sent all their able-bodied men to war—the English Army recruited mainly from the poor, the tramps, and the convict. On the other hand, Conscription was much more demanding and universal in Scotland, Ireland, Canada and the colonies of the Empire.

family calm with her last four children who became teenagers. She also created a feverish effervescence in the search for a new companion for life... or death; a companion who would love her with all his heart, because it is obvious for a woman in search of security that it is more profitable and fruitful to marry a man *who loves her* rather than a man *she loves!*

At 45, she still displayed a serene and attractive face even though she had become a "fleshy woman", or rather a plump woman. But isn't it precisely the flesh that men seek? She was flanked and escorted boys and girls by her four surviving children. The other children had already left this world of poverty and misery. One died a lot at the Walkers', as much as at the home of Sara, daughter of Raguel, in the *Biblical Book of Tobias*¹².

Among the Walkers, too, Death seemed to be constantly on the lookout for good opportunities. Tastes and colors are not debatable, it is a matter of personal choice, as is frequently said. Charm and overweightness are a matter of taste. What some consider a handicap pleases others, hungry for opulent and planturous flesh.

After several weeks of waiting, Elizabeth-Anne (45) was happy to charm a thirty-year-old man, Tyrrell Tilford, 15 years her junior, who preferred the sumptuousness and

¹² •In the biblical *Book of Tobias*, the very beautiful Sara, only daughter of Raguel, therefore very desirable heir for all these reasons, had seven (7) husbands who all died mysteriously, just before the wedding night, so much so that the suitors became scarce. Thus, Sara had remained a virgin, and she had been able to offer her precious hymen to her cousin Tobias, whom she loved with boundless love. According to some, it was God who killed the first seven husbands; according to others, it was the Demon. No one suspected the holy and beautiful Sara of being the murderer. This consanguineous marriage made it possible to preserve the patrimony within the family.

comfort of generous curves, to the bitter and bony thinness of filiform women. He quickly became her new husband before God and before men. He was a truck driver, a member of the great American Teamsters Union recently founded at the turn of the century. She met him in the Church of the Salvation Army and they immediately were in agreement.

Despite its bellicose name, the Salvation Army is a gathering of harmless and peaceful people, as peaceful as they are dedicated. A benevolence and a sweetness of the most seductive emanated from the opulent face of Elizabeth-Anne, like a charming perfume that exhales from a multicolored bouquet of green belladones, mauve colchics and purple aconites, all spiked with gold buttercups. But all these beautiful flowers are poisonous and lethal and the bouquet might look like a funeral wreath!

Elizabeth-Anne and Tyrrell were married on November 10th, 1930, in Woodstock, without any further questions! If Tyrrell had asked himself a few, perhaps he would not have found himself a few years later in such a tragic position... and, consequently, neither does Elizabeth-Anne! Why would the gentle and debonair, who by their passivity let the wicked persecute them, not also have their responsibilities committed when relentlessness becomes criminal? Unconditional gentleness is clearly not desirable; it encourages abuse.



Four years after this marriage, the chronic instability that inhabited Elizabeth-Anne, now *Mrs. Tilford*, had gradually reappeared like a stubborn snowdrop, to

undermine the understanding and happiness of this fragile couple. The wife thought she solved her discomfort by taking a lover. Some psychiatrists, graduates in fraudulent universities¹³, advocate these frivolous solutions.

From then on, Elizabeth-Anne ostensibly had an affair with a 42-year-old man, William Percy Blake, 3 years her junior. Her third husband (Tyrrell), so young (12 years younger than the lover), complained bitterly on several occasions to his wife and his own parents. But as Elizabeth-Anne persisted in her therapeutic *petticoat running*, Tyrrell eventually turned a blind eye to his wife's infidelities in the hope that the marital storm would calm itself under the soothing hand of the "Salvationist" Lord, as in the parable of the evangelist Mark.

But the spouse was wrong. Not only would the squall not subside, but it would engulf them both. Tyrrell himself, as a husband, became more and more cumbersome in the wind of freedom that his wife wanted to breathe. Not keen to display on her forehead the slightest stigma —then infamous— of "divorcée", Elizabeth-Anne preferred to opt for the final solution which had probably proven its efficiency twice already in her life.

As soon as this decision was taken, relations between the spouses deteriorated even more quickly, reaching a level of no return. Elizabeth Anne's mother-in-law was Mary Tilford. She watched with great attention the evolution of the couple, and because of this, like most mothers-

¹³ •These "fake Universities" are numerous in the United States, England, China and India. Hundreds of officials from these various administrations obtained their posts with false diplomas.

in-law, she was aware of everything. Thanks to her highly biased mother-in-law mind, she began to guess what was going on.

Later, she assured that, as early as February 1935, her son Tyrrell systematically complained of *heartburn* after each meal. Anxious to blur her own responsibility, Elizabeth-Anne never failed to ridicule these complaints, calling him an *inveterate cozy man* and mocking his imaginary illnesses. Yet Tyrrell had previously enjoyed robust health and had never complained of any problems. How was this possible? Mom Tilford quickly feared that the answer that came to her mind was the right one.

For another completely unknown reason, three of Mrs. Tilford's four surviving children (2 boys and one girl) born from the *second bed*¹⁴, previously occupied by Sergeant-Major William Walker, lived with them. Heavily influenced by their mother, all of them irretrievably hated their stepfather Tyrrell. Some evil beings, who have married for reasons other than Love, spend their time making their spouse regret having loved them.

The two Walker boys, trained at the harsh coal miners' school, treated him with abhorrent vulgarity and abject ferocity. The eldest, nicknamed with the significant *alias* of "Bulldog", even went so far as to subject him to physical violence with the enthusiastic approval of their mother Elizabeth-Anne, who obviously considered these brutalities as pleasantly entertaining. Eager to demonize her husband in order to better justify her hatred and his

¹⁴ •Two boys (one 21 years old and the other younger) and a girl, Isabelle, aged between 16 and 19 years.

killing, following the principle that one accuses his dog of rabies when one wants to shoot him, she told anyone who wanted to hear her that "her husband mistreated his daughter Isabelle, a 16-year-old girl, by forcing her to take out day after day the household waste that smelled very bad!"

Despite the sustained efforts of the wife Elizabeth-Anne who wanted to present her husband under the features of an unbearable brute, the mistreatment of the father by the mother and her wicked boys was long observed, described and proven at the *Coroner's Inquest* that followed his death and which can be consulted at the *National Archives of Canada* in Ottawa. In fact, these attempts to denigrate Tyrrell were never successful and only exposed the conspiracy to demonize Tyrrell and attempt to forge some excuse for his death. It was irrefutably established that, under the orchestration of Elizabeth-Anne, each member without exception of this charming family considered it his duty of *family solidarity* to make the life of the unfortunate Tyrrell as horrible as possible.

Perhaps they were trying to push him to suicide, which would have absolved them of any judicial blame. However, among the physical or psychological tortures inflicted on him in this *House of Horrors*, the most vicious, the most destructive was imagined by his wife Elizabeth-Anne herself: *she brought almost daily to the family home her new lover of 42 years, William Percy Blake, with whom she fornicated like a beast and without the slightest discretion on the marital bed.* Blake was thus able to shamelessly enjoy all the advantages of voluptuousness, generously rewarded by Elizabeth-Anne, because he

possessed the irresistible charm of being the owner of two beautiful agricultural farms.

Following Elizabeth-Anne's logical process, investigators were able to prophesy that this young and handsome William Percy Blake was in fourth place in the unwritten list of victims of this human tarantula, because Tyrrell's imminent death by poison would allow his ex-wife to get properly married to Blake. Thus, she could probably liquidate him in turn.

From the tarantula, Elizabeth-Anne possessed the technique of killing her victims. It is well known that the venom of this spider plunges its victim into a deep state of lethargy that leads relentlessly to death. The poison administered by Elizabeth-Anne Tilford, in minimal amounts but on a daily basis, buried Tyrrell in a stupor that would also inevitably end in the other world, the day she increased the dose.

Between spasms, Tyrrell complained bitterly to his mother about his wife's willingness to murder him. Why, then, did he remain in the hands of his executioner, when he knew that she was slowly killing him? Out of love, no doubt, because any other explanation seems precarious and uncertain. Terrible enigma! A modern psychiatrist, with more convoluted neurons, would perhaps see masochism or even sadomasochism, because by accepting his sad Destiny in this way, he inevitably condemned his wife to death on the gallows.

In this tragedy that would end in two deaths, only one of the actors kept a cool head: Tyrrell's Mom, Mary Tilford. With her twisted mother-in-law's intuition, she

saw the crime materialize very clearly, to the point that to protect herself, she terminated six life insurance policies for the benefit of her son, which threatened his own (and her own) existence. Had she been trying to tempt bounty hunters, so far?

SENTENCED TO HANG



MRS. ELIZABETH TILFORD
Counsel for Mrs. Elizabeth Tilford of Woodstock, who was sentenced to hang for murder of her husband by poisoning, have announced appeal of sentence.

In any case, six brief weeks before Tyrrell's death, Elizabeth-Anne consulted an Insurance Agent to estimate how much money her husband's death would generate. By the time she asked these obviously disturbing questions, her husband was in perfect health, with no disturbing signs in the couple. As for the lover on duty, some witnesses pointed out that Blake was present during the very last night during which Tilford died. He even helped the assassin get rid of the corpse.

It cannot be overemphasized that the killer's arrest was a momentous chance for the new lover on duty, because if she had been able to carry out the next romance, Blake would probably have been quick to join all his naïve known predecessors (Frank Yaxley, William Walker and

Tyrrell Tilford), to share with these three men a cosmic idiot-poker tournament.

Despite Tilford's generally satisfactory health, in the very first days of his death throes, the Camarde—the Princess of Death—had to rub her hands with satisfaction, for the husband, now entirely covered with life insurances, became for Elizabeth-Anne the keystone of her future family prosperity. He was the fat game to kill as soon as possible. It became therefore necessary for Elizabeth-Anne to destroy Tilford, that keystone, that *central stone*, which would allow the vault of wealth to fall in a rich shower of gold bricks. The ingots that made up the vault would fall in hail around her and her children. She looked forward with immense satisfaction to the influx of money in the form of insurance premiums and widow's pensions, which she had already obtained from her previous husbands.

She wanted to accumulate them, as today some widows—or widowers—accumulate the half-pensions of their successive spouses. This goal tapped into Elizabeth-Anne's rapacity so strongly that she pushed recklessness to the point of discussing the murder with her two bittern boys, just before her husband sank into the fictitious "disease" that was to prevail. Elizabeth-Anne Tilford would fiercely deny her criminal plan until proved to her that she had gone to inquire with the Life Insurance Company. Before this evidence was presented to her as a blatant and irrefutable exhibit, she had denied ever knowing that there was any life insurances on her husband's head.

In truth, she had a solid knowledge of insurance. The Canadian investigator W.W. Watson stated that when she

had "been transferred to Canada in 1928 by the Salvation Army, in which her husband Walker and herself held officer roles, she had the primary task of dealing with certain insurance details for the benefit of the Salvation Army, such as inheritance of patrimony, *post-mortem* donations, sessions of *ab intestate* property, rights *de cuius*, various wills, abandonment of property, general successions, *preciput* rights, *synallagmatic* commitment... She was a real specialist.

As a result, it was proved "by this *dear Watson*", that she knew very well the exact amounts of the sums that would accrue to her, when her "dear" husband would breathe the last sigh. Elizabeth-Anne was, however, very disappointed because the Life Insurance Companies took advantage of the legal proceedings, which left a cloud of doubt and guilt, to refuse to pay her anything until her innocence was solidly substantiated, and her Virtue restored to her pedestal.

Despite the widowed mother's pension that she had received and accumulated upon the death of each of her previous husbands, she stated during the trial that, with her children, she was vegetating in the most squalid poverty. Anxious to mitigate her responsibilities in this crime, which she did not admit, she insisted on convincing the jurors that she was a poor woman, a victim of everything and everyone, including her husband.

Very intelligent, she knew how to play as a virtuoso on the keyboards of pity, compassion and mercy, as some prefer the keyboard of victimization by racism, xenophobia or outrageous hatred. To refute the suspicions of

marriage fraud, she retaliated by alleging that Tyrrell was still in debt, and that he could only survive thanks to the material help she generously gave him. In order not to tarnish the admiration she thought she aroused in others for her, she carefully avoided to mention that the bank drafts, paid for their own dwelling house, were entirely assumed by her in-laws, mother and father in-law.

In order to survive and to put some butter in the family's spinach, she had been forced to work part-time along with one of her sons. As a result, she had wished to part with Tilford – with all due honour, of course – to obtain a higher bracket of the Widowed Mother's Pension Allowance. Thanks to a proper separation, she could have continued to live in the house whose maintenance costs, as mentioned above, as well as municipal and school taxes, as well as bank loan fees, were entirely paid by Tilford's in-laws, the same ones who, with despair, could contemplate their son in agony, subjected to the excruciating suffering inflicted by this Machiavellian, not to say satanic, daughter-in-law. Did she think the in-laws would continue to pay for her? Probably not! But the life insurance premiums that would then fall would make it possible to close the loans and pay the debts in full. Elizabeth-Anne was a genius in fraud.

As for the non-monetary motivations of this profusion of crimes, a behaviorist psychiatrist specializing in the most unusual, disconcerting human behaviors, hypothesized that¹⁵, after the first effervescences due to novelty,

¹⁵ •Hypothesis reported by the investigators and mentioned in the Public Archives of Canada.

her husbands became probably always very quickly tired of Elizabeth-Anne because of her too nymphomaniac side¹⁶. All these men were therefore very fast "outdated" in the perpetually ardent mind of Elizabeth-Anne.

The lady therefore wished to keep the field free and a free hand in the sexual domain, while maintaining a keen eye on the real estate of her partners. In the hierarchy of the various motives for her crimes, no other motivation seemed more obvious to them than this overdose of sex that she was so fond of. A Parisian hetaïre once confessed that "in her profession, *hell* was to have to give *paradise* to men." In a sense, this was the case for Elizabeth-Anne.



Coroner and police investigators opened a macabre skylight into Elizabeth-Anne's past life in England. It amply confirmed the curious theory of the behavioral specialist. The Walker couple behaved normally at the very beginning of their married life and got along in an acceptable way, but as soon as Walker fell ill, and thus became dependent on his wife, the latter totally neglected him and "*let him die like a dog*," to use the expression of those who felt enough empathy to take care of Walker in the few weeks before his death. "*I have proof¹⁷ that Mr. Walker accused his wife in the presence of other people, in front of witnesses, just before he died, of poisoning her with*

¹⁶ •"Overly sexed." Shakespeare's language can be shown without artifice to the point of immodest exhibitionism.

¹⁷ •This evidence could not be used during the trial.

Lemon Salts¹⁸" And the investigator continued: "One woman revealed that just before Mr. Walker died, Mrs. Walker went to see her, because her husband was also sick, and she suggested a way to get rid of him, by boiling a few potatoes separately in one saucepan, and a few carrots in another; it was enough to add Lemon Salts in the two pans and make him swallow the mixture. She would be quickly rid of him...

She did not explain the usefulness of cooking carrots and potatoes separately. Maybe it was only because she didn't have a big enough pan! "*In addition, added other prosecution witnesses, when he died, she pocketed all the various life insurance premiums and then gave a real banquet at the end of her burial, which, according to some those present, looked more like a wedding than a funeral meal¹⁹.*" She seemed to consider that it was necessary "to pick the roses of life" as the poet Ronsard once said. She meant to take advantage of the excess of money, as if the candidates for marriage with her would never be lacking, thanks to her devouring nymphomania, what men are usually so fond of... until exhaustion... and death.

Despite her legendary open-mindedness, the Salvation Army refused her support from that moment on, relying on rumors of dissolute life that she enjoyed with a wide variety of gentlemen, themselves considered unworthy to be frequented. This did not fit at all with the spiritual and

¹⁸ •Salts of Lemon also called potassium hydrogenoxalate, or hydrogenated potassium oxalate, or potassium binoxalate, or potassium oxalate acid, or potassium monobasic oxalate, or Sorrel salts, or sal acetosella, in two words: deadly poison.

¹⁹ •Letter from WW Watson, Chief Investigator, Fingerprint Bureau, Criminal Investigation Dpt. Ottawa, National Archives, Ottawa.

moral canons of this Church very focused on Social Works and Salvation through Works, with the exception of the work of flesh, of course! No! Flesh could certainly lead to the Seventh Heaven, but probably not to the Heaven of the Salvationists!

Rejected by her religious Community, but yet tormented by her spiritual demands to make her gain eternal salvation, at the same time as by her more prosaic appetites already too generously evoked, Elizabeth later tried to join other Churches. But her reputation had followed her as a wedding dress tail, or even preceded her as a comet tail, and she was not considered welcome in any sect. Denied to all, she then took refuge in pure and hard Spiritualism, from where she slipped inexorably towards clairvoyance, divination and prophetic delirium.

Every night, after a few updates in typtological scene intended to inspire confidence in the naïve, she metamorphosed herself into a Delphic Pythia and tried to make them believe that her ramblings paved the way for their future and their happiness.



The impression of all those who frequented and knew this Walker family a little intimately, at the time of her second marriage, was that Madame had most certainly poisoned this husband too. A few witnesses had seen her discreetly pouring a mysterious powder every time she offered him a glass of beverage, so Walker invariably vomited, complaining of the unbearable taste by its bitterness. But when a visitor went to get water from the tap to give him a drink, Walker often remarked:

—*This water tastes good, it is so different from the one Lizzie gives me!*

Why, then, did all her husbands seem to bring so much complacency and self-denial to let themselves be murdered without reacting, like the lambs by the Beast of Gevaudan? Everyone—including jurors and magistrates—bent down on this riddle by scratching their heads and frowning. Presumably because Madame took great care to knock out her successive husbands with sleeping pills and various drugs, which numbed their brains, making them carefree and instinctive zombies.

The doctor who cared for Walker, her second husband, carefully kept a copy of all the prescriptions for medication he prescribed to his patients and more specifically to Walker. As a result, he was able to assure the investigators that, never at all, he had asked Mrs. Walker to obtain any white powder to make her husband ingest it. True, he left on her nightstand some sleeping pills with strict instructions to make him absorb only one tablet each night before bedtime. Yet it was later learned that Mrs. Walker had sent a young woman to the doctor to obtain from him a supplement of tablets of this category, on the pretext that the Walker children had thrown several in the garbage. It was a sordid sham.

Mrs. Walker made him swallow these pills at every moment, as soon as she judged that he was coming to his senses and that his judgment became consistent again, in order to plunge him back into a state of deep lethargy and permanent drowsiness. Under the effect of this murderous medicine, Walker eventually became blind, so that it

became totally impossible for him to know what she was making him ingest. The wife's behavior seemed deliberate, for a very specific purpose that everyone could easily imagine.



Returning to Elizabeth-Anne's new profession of clairvoyance and prophetic delirium, it was apparently following one of her divinatory consultations that she came across her third husband, Tyrrell Tilford, the ultimate victim. He was described to investigators as "an uneducated type of man, rough but robust, almost 20 years her junior. She married him. He was a charlatan of small ambition but from a most honorable family." The expression "most honorable" of course inspired "affluence, prosperity or fortune in the material realm." Tyrrell Tilford was exactly the kind of prey Elizabeth-Anne needed insofar as he also accumulated the three qualifiers of boorish, without ambition and young. Like a tarantula, she was thus able to satisfy all her basic needs, sex, money, including that of liquidating him when he would no longer provide for the task, by drawing from his life and death a good insurance premium as well as the inheritance from his parents.

This marriage had certainly not been encouraged by Tyrrell's much more perceptive mother, but when it was accomplished, the in-laws did everything possible to facilitate its smooth running. They helped them, for example, to build a small house within the boundaries of their property, very close to them, and they paid strictly each month the cost of the mortgage. Thanks to them, Tyrrell was even

hired by the municipality to collect household waste in their Ontario town of Woodstock.

While he was absent to practice his job as a garbage collector, revealed the criminal investigation, many male patients came to consult the new Mrs. Tilford "to make her decipher their future in a cup of tea, in the coffee grounds and the lines of their hand"²⁰, or perhaps even in the manner of the Etruscan haruspices who discovered the future in the bowels of the victims. Ah! If Mrs. Tilford had been able to predict that the Canadian Coroner would read her criminal past in the bowels of her successive husbands! Perhaps she would have been more cautious!

The police investigation therefore establishes that, in the hands of his arachnid wife who surrounded him and imprisoned him little by little in his chemical bristles, the unfortunate Tilford had ended up suffering the same fate as his predecessors. "Just before he breathed his last, Elizabeth-Anne made him swallow tablets entirely different from those that Dr. Lindsay, his attending physician, had prescribed. These pills contained arsenic. So, his purpose was very clear," said Principal Investigator W.W. Watson of the *Fingerprint Office* at the *Ottawa Department of Criminal Investigations*.

The written testimony of "that dear Watson" concluded with these eloquent words: "*I do not think there is*

²⁰ •The comments in this paragraph come from the letter from WW Watson, Esq. Fingerprint Bureau, Criminal Investigation Dept. Ottawa, Ont. On letterhead from the Ontario Provincial Police, Criminal Investigation Branch, Parliament Building, Toronto. 28 October 1935. The letter is currently at the *Public Archives of Canada*, Ottawa. Criminal Record RG 13, Vol. 1598, Vol. 1599, File CC 437; 1935. Elizabeth-Anne Tilford. Quotation marks have been omitted because the translation does not follow the word for word.

any ambiguity or doubt about Elizabeth-Anne's guilt, for, according to my own investigation in this matter, it would be difficult to conceive of a more finely planned way of getting rid of those who have become useless to her. Before getting married, Ms. Tilford had been hired as a nurse and midwife by a certain Dr. English in the city of Durham (England), and she stated that the doctor in question had revealed to her all his recipes²¹ of drug mixtures. She was therefore well accustomed to handling the many poisons that could be used in the manufacture of medicinal prescriptions."

The *Coroner's Inquest* brought to light other very disturbing facts. For example, on March 20th, 1935, shortly after noon, Elizabeth-Anne phoned the pharmacy to order two ounces of arsenic, "because her husband was picking up household garbage and this attracted rats that had to be disposed of". When Commissionaire Victor King came to bring the poison to the Tilfords, Elizabeth-Anne had arranged to be absent. She had asked at what precise moment the arsenic would be delivered and so she was able to leave by taking as an excuse a visit to a friend, Mrs. Argent. The arsenic was therefore delivered in her absence, possibly to be able to deny responsibility with some plausibility.

Isabelle, her daughter from a previous bed, signed the receipt in her place. Was she trying to implicate her daughter by having her initial the slip to acknowledge receipt of the arsenic? When the chief druggist later saw that it was Isabelle who had signed the acknowledgment of

²¹ •The drugs were all made by apothecaries (pharmacists) from complicated 'Recipes' symbolized by Rx or R.

receipt, he modified the order slip to indicate that the poison order had been made by the young Isabelle Tilford. The law required that the product be delivered to the person who ordered it.

That evening Tyrrell arrived from work before his wife Elizabeth-Anne returned from Mrs. Argent's house. The girl, who was not aware of her mother's criminal plans, gave him the package. Tyrrell immediately became suspicious when he saw that it was poison. He asked his daughter not to notify her mother of the delivery of the orpiment. In the weeks that followed, he warned several members of his family that his wife seemed to wish to poison him: "*She has already killed her first two husbands and I will be the third,*" he told them. "*She will kill more.*"

The husband's brother, Edward Tilford, testified under oath that Tyrrell had once told him that, in his opinion, his stomach aches were due to the arsenic administered to him by his wife. One wonders why this man continued to ingest so assiduously the meals she prepared for him with so much care. As a perfect narcissistic-pervert, Elizabeth-Anne defended herself by playing the victim; victim of her husband's paranoia and of a vast family conspiracy to eliminate her. The world is so bad! Thus, by playing the poor victims, she exorcised in the blink of an eye all the accusations addressed to her to divert them away from her own person, and accuse her entourage. Narcissistic perverts who can act as true angels of kindness with their friends, usually behave with perverse wickedness towards their mother, father or spouse, i.e. those who love them unconditionally; especially if they are weak, gentle, shy and eager to forgive everything. In a word, they are angels

with their children and friends, and demons with their spouse and parents.

The next day, March 21st, Elizabeth-Anne phoned Madame Argent to tell her that her husband was sick. Moreover, after the death of her husband, she committed the heavy recklessness of writing a note to Mrs. Argent to warn her that "the police were making an investigation and [she begged] not to interfere": "The police were investigating and do not get mixed up in it," she warned. Two witnesses had seen Tyrrell vomit profusely and with great distress. "His eyes were all yellow and deep in their orbit."

On Thursday evening, March 28th, Tyrrell's sister, who bore the marital surname "*Allen*", received a call from Elizabeth-Anne asking her to come as soon as possible because Tyrrell would probably not spend the night and he wanted to write his will. The Allens arrived as soon as possible. Tyrrell told Walter Allen that he wanted to bequeath all his possessions to his wife Lizzie; everything, i.e. the house and the furniture (in total \$300.00 or \$400.00). It was necessary to add to these material goods a life insurance of about \$300.00 a total sum of about \$ 700.000 of today (2010). The house had been offered to the couple by the Tilford parents who tirelessly continued to repay the bank loan!



On Friday, March 29th, 1935, Tyrrell Tilford got up very early in the morning and, staggering heavily, showed up at his parents' house on the other side of the garden. He announced that he wanted to return "home" —that is to say to his parents— to die.

Mrs. Mary Tilford, his 76-year-old mother, very lucid, said that she "saw her son appear at 6:45 am. He seemed very sick, very thin. His head was spinning." Tyrrell stayed with his parents all day on Friday, as well as on Saturday, March 30th. He vomited a lot, as if he had "swallowed some *green-of-Paris*"²². He was weakening visibly. His mother claimed not to have given him any medicine on Friday and Saturday. Despite this —or rather, for this reason—, at the end of the day, on Saturday, he seemed to be getting back on track and moving away from death. He was a little better. He had to have iron health to recover so easily from such arsenic treatment.

Tyrrell asked to see his wife. They went to get her, and when she arrived, she said right away:

—*Why didn't you stay at home?*"

He rebuffed her with a gesture, whispering:

—*You know Lizzie. You poisoned me! I'm dying and you'll soon be able to live with the man who has two farms, Bill Blake.*

With that said, Tyrrell turned to his father and added:

—*Listen to what I have to say to you: When I'm dead, I want the contents of my stomach to be analyzed!*

Then, spreading his arms in the manner of ancient heroes, he added to his mother's intention:

²² •The *vert-de-Paris* or *Schweinfurt green* is the name of arsenic. It once served as a pigment for painters who practiced their pictorial art in Paris: Cézanne, Van Gogh, Monet, who became sick or blind.

—*I want to kiss you, Mom! This is the last kiss you will have from me.*

Suddenly agitated like a Fury of Mythology, Elizabeth-Anne, who, without a word, had hitherto attended this spectacle that directly implicated her, rushed to the telephone to call the pharmacy. She wanted the attendants pharmacist tell her that they had not delivered arsenic to her that day. Under the verbal assault, the pharmacist replied laconically: *No!*

On this last Saturday of their child's life, the Tilford parents wanted to keep their sick son at home, with all the more insistence that they strongly suspected their daughter-in-law of murdering him. They decided to stay bravely *awake* to protect their son. But, like two large Laurentian moose besieged all night by a pack of hungry wolves, the old Tilford parents were defeated by fatigue and by irresistible sleep. Their age got the better of their resistance. As soon as they were asleep and oblivious to the drama unfolding under their roof, Elizabeth-Anne, who wanted to end it as soon as possible, used her supreme authority to bring her husband Tyrrell home, to the house next door.

Thus, since in Canada the spouse has more legal authority than the parents, like in Anglo-Saxon Law, the parents did not win their case the next day when they wanted to bring their beloved son back to their home. Tyrrell stayed with his wife all Sunday and died murdered on Monday morning, April 1st, 1935, very early at dawn.

The incompetent physician Dr. Hugh Lindsay declared Tyrrell dead of *carditis flu* and *catarrhal jaundice*²³. These mysterious names draped his ignorance and incapacity with supernatural skills. However, subsequent examinations by specialist doctors —and in particular Dr. Frankish's analysis— found a large amount of arsenic concentrated in his viscera. Thanks to the notorious incapacity of Lindsay, family doctor of this charming couple, who had probably never re-opened a book of medicine since their very distant London studies (if he really was a graduate!), Elizabeth Anne had all the time to destroy the last traces of her inexpiable crime.

The slanderous rumors about the possibility of murder caused Dr. Lindsay to hasten to make a verbal report to the local Coroner, probably as incompetent as he was, and they decided by mutual agreement that *an autopsy was not desirable*. Probably because it risked highlighting that his initial diagnosis was wrong. The corpse was hastily buried in the Protestant cemetery in Woodstock, Ontario, to put an end to any controversy.

The dice seemed stacked. Mary Tilford, Tyrrell's mother, furious at having been played this terrible trick, refused to give up her fight. She was sure that her hypocritical daughter-in-law was the cause of her dear son's death, and no one —except a mother-in-law who wants to challenge her daughter-in-law— is more stubborn than a mother to defend her children, or to avenge them when the damage is done. So, she began harassing the local police

²³ •Flu [myo]carditis = Inflammation of the heart muscle. Catarrhal jaundice = Infectious hepatitis.

so that an official investigation could be opened as soon as possible.

But the police remained as deaf, mute and blind as the three oriental Monkeys of Wisdom. At 55, one of two things, either the fatality that weighed on Elizabeth-Anne's head was deadly, or was there another explanation more sinister, gloomier. The rumors launched by her girlfriends to whom this chatter had committed the imprudence of entrusting part of her secret, were chilling. And then it was the secret phone call of one of these ladies to the police that led to the final avalanche:

—*Elizabeth-Anne had, she said, called her, just after Tyrrell's death, to ask her "not to reveal under any circumstances to anyone that she had bought arsenic."*

The police then decided to take a closer look at the corpse that was secretly exhumed during the moonless night of April 25th, 1935, less than a month after the murder. The digging operation was kept a secret in order to spare the susceptibility of the incompetent Dr. Hugh Lindsay, who would probably have been all the more furious as his diagnosis would be considered inadequate and even criminally fanciful. Conversely, thousands of innocent people have always been sentenced to death and executed because vain Prosecutors had themselves sunk into crime by refusing to acknowledge their mistakes. There are thousands of ways to be a criminal.

Chemical analysis of the stomach contents revealed of course the presence of arsenic. The renowned inspector Edward D. Hammond was given the delicate task of clarifying this matter. Hammond combed the regional drug

pharmacies and learned that Isabella Tilford, Elizabeth Anne's daughter, had indeed ordered and received sixty grams of arsenic on March 20th, ten days before the murder. The adolescent revealed to the investigator that it was initially her mother who had placed the order but that the pharmacist had changed the name to comply with the municipal *by-laws* in force.

The singularity of the problem resided in the fact that the girl had given the bag of poison to her father and not to her mother. Elizabeth-Anne, for her part, swore to all her great gods that *she herself had not ordered any arsenic, and had never received any*. According to her, her husband had probably made the order on her behalf in order to implicate her in a fictitious crime, in truth a suicide, disguised as a sneaky crime, in order to incriminate her, and to take revenge for reasons of marital disagreement, as often happens when passion Love metamorphoses into passionate Hatred. When love is extinguished, multitudes of unfulfillable resentments, devouring frustrations, even jealousies, deep malevolence, petrify into secret hatred. This desire for revenge can push one of the spouses to destroy the other one, directly by crime or slyly by false accusations exhaled from beyond the grave. She was so brilliant in her tortuous inventions that she would probably have been able to write scenarios as prodigious as those of Stephen King.

Thus defended Elizabeth-Anne. Anyway, Inspector Hammond sent the viscera to Dr. E.R. Frankish, a poison toxicologist, who also detected the presence of arsenic in the hair and nails of the deceased. He clarified an important fact: this poison had been ingested over a long

period of time. It could not be a temporary accident or a one-time suicide.



On June 6th, 1935, the police finally announced the opening of the *Coroner's Inquest*, which some call the *Preliminary Investigation*. Five days later, Elizabeth-Anne was officially arrested, imprisoned and brought before the Prosecutor's office to be charged with the murder of her last husband Tyrrell, to the immense joy of her mother-in-law. Judge E.S. Livermore opened the Preliminary Hearings in Woodstock on St. John's Day, June 24th, 1935, while in the neighbouring province, Quebecers celebrated their National Day with jubilation by marching through the streets of Montréal, the Canadian Metropolis in this time, a young blond shepherd leading a lamb on a leash²⁴.

The incriminating evidence was considered so light that the wife's conviction seemed far from assured. In fact, the only connection between Tyrrell's obvious poisoning and Elizabeth-Anne was that she was the one who prepared her husband's meals. The witnesses just repeated tirelessly the terrible accusations made by the victim to her entourage, or the disturbing confidences of Elizabeth-Anne to her friends, real confessions of guilt. Despite the absence of absolute and irrefutable evidence, Judge E.S. Livermore decided that there was still a matter for the Court of Assizes and that Elizabeth should be brought promptly before that Court.

²⁴ •St. John the Baptist leading his sheep. This religious aspect ended with the Quiet Revolution in the '60s, when a journalist denigrated this custom, which seemed to symbolize French-Canadians led on a leash by the English.



The trial before the Woodstock Court of Assizes began on September 24th, 1935, while the coquettish Nature dressed herself with the red and gold clothes of the enchanting Autumn "whose clever brush reddens the green foliage and gilds the shrub." Prosecutor C.L. Snyder supported the thesis that Elizabeth-Anne had slowly administered light doses of arsenic to her husband to poison him slowly, and thus suggest that he was the victim of a rare disease that desperately undermined his health, one of those rare and unknown diseases of traditional medicine.

The reason for this criminal assault was, according to Snyder, that Elizabeth-Anne ostensibly maintained a love affair with William Percy Blake, and that, as a result, Tyrrell became possessive and derogatory to her. Twenty-four prosecution witnesses came to substantiate these accusations and convince the jurors of Elizabeth-Anne Tyrrell's guilt: druggists, medical doctors, investigative police officers, pathologist experts, not to mention mother-in-law Tilford, combative as a tigress. The telephone list of an *arsenic order* was presented by the pharmacist. Professor Joslyn Rogers, an expert on the subject, stated that arsenic had been found in Tilford's stomach and viscera.

Attorney Charles W. Bell, assisted by Frank Regan, thought themselves fit and qualified to defend Elizabeth-Anne at a time when an incompetent or inexperienced attorney provided nothing but rope to his client and fragments of *lucky rope* to the superstitious. These two individuals, if one dares to call them "Defenders", not only produced no witnesses, but, judging the case hopeless,

forbade Elizabeth-Anne to speak publicly, according to the dangerous tactic of *The Defence Rests*; a sometimes suicidal strategy (when misused) that plays every other time against the accused, as mentioned above.

Defense Attorney Bell explained to the jury that he had "*refused to call Mrs. Tilford to the witness stand because he did not want to get this woman through all this horrible jumble of accusations.*" He probably reserved his heavy artillery for the end —the final bouquet, so to speak—. In the manner of *Sun Tzu*²⁵, he let the enemy approach by making him believe that victory was acquired, and then, vlan! Trap! Overconfident, the enemy fell into the ambush set by the *Imperial Guard* in person! And the Prosecution, gripped by an irrepressible panic, had only to flee cowardly. It was therefore a tactic that was supposed to make the innocence of the accused burst out in front of the stunned jurors just before their final deliberation. Dramatic reversal of the situation! Ridiculous tipping of the Prosecution!

Through this tactic, the Defenders become heroes admired, praised, and revered. But there you have it! To carry out this Napoleonic tactic, the Defense attorney had to show the indisputable qualities of a fine strategist, otherwise it was a mess for him... and the rope for the accused.

In the case of Elizabeth-Anne, this strategy was totally unsuccessful. In a nutshell, the Defense's final argument was summed up as follows: "*It was not Elizabeth who was in possession of the arsenic but the victim herself.*

²⁵ •Sun Tzu or Sun Tsou was a genius Chinese strategist and tactician who wrote an Art of War.

In reality, Tyrrell hated his wife so much that he committed suicide by poisoning himself in order to have his wife accused. And he put the blame on her! Otherwise why would he have stayed in this house where he claimed that his wife was poisoning him, as he repeated to anyone who wanted to hear him!" It was, before the time, the Syndrome of Cindy James²⁶.

The theory was logical and sound and should have shaken the jurors, but the lawyer's public speaking skills were probably not up to par with those of the Prosecutor. The fact remains, however, that today a suspect would not be convicted without real evidence, especially considering that the poisoning had chronologically begun even before the delivery of the poison to the Tilfords.

Anyway, on this Wednesday, October 2nd, 1935, in the early afternoon, the jurors began their deliberations and reached a verdict at the end of the evening, in eight hours. Elizabeth-Anne was found

GUILTY

and the crime appeared so vicious, so villainous, so perverse, so scandalous, that no one felt the need, considered it desirable to recommend the *Indulgence of the jury* to the Crown.

Assizes Judge A.C. Kingstone then read the sentence to Elizabeth-Anne: *hanging by the neck until death ensued*. Under this tragic avalanche of verdict and sentence

²⁶ •See about it, *L'étrange vie et la mystérieuse mort de Cindy James*, in the book entitled *À la limite de l'horreur*, by Jean-Claude Castex, Éditions des Intouchables, Montréal, 2005. pp. 35 et seq.

that deprived her of the slightest hope of survival, the accused seemed to wish to remain as still and silent as possible, to be forgotten, to let the storm pass, and thus slip between the drops of Destiny. Suddenly she came out of her torpor, and cried out with great anger accompanied by uncontrollable gesticulations:

—Your Lordship is not fair! I was trapped! If at least I had been given the chance to present my evidence. I was fooled! Absolutely! May God have mercy on the souls of the Tilfords!

The case was immediately appealed in November. But, curiously and despite the unimaginable weakness of concrete evidence, the Appeal was lamentably dismissed and the original sentence upheld.



Contrary to the Canadian tradition of opposing the execution of women, Progenitors of Humanity, Elizabeth-Anne's conviction aroused no passion, no conflagration of spirits, no riot of solidarity. Not a single mass petition this time. The average Canadian—male or female—imagined himself in horror in Tyrrell's place, reduced by poison to the state of zombie, sub-man, resigned victim, by this ruthless tarantula and by her brutal, cruel and cynical boys. Some 100 individual applications were quickly rejected with hatred or contempt. Elizabeth-Anne was literally abandoned to her sad fate, as Tyrrell had been to the sharp clutches of this nymphomaniac. In those times, frigidity was still the most acceptable standard of Lady Morality. Nymphomania was an inexpiable tare that was spoken of only by lowering one's voice and squinting one's eyelids.

An appeal in favour of Ms. Tilford to the Ontario Court of Appeal was unanimously dismissed in November by the judges. Any late challenge raised by the Defense was denied, including one that criticized the Crown for failing to bring to the stand in a more sustained manner certain witnesses such as Isabelle Walker. This girl was the one who received the arsenic when it was delivered to the Tilfords' home. Curiously, this last Judgment of the Court of Appeal stated that there was no evidence to establish that Mrs. Tilford had not had in her possession the arsenic delivered by the courier of the pharmacy. This was only an *a contrario* argument that violated the principle that it was up to the Crown, and only to the Crown, to prove guilt.

The Judgment of the Court of Appeal also added that there was no evidence to prove that "the statements of the victim on his deathbed came from an unbalanced mind." The Defense's argument, concerning the causes of death and the possibility of camouflaged suicide incriminating the spouse, was definitively rejected and swept under the rug of the courtroom to join the dust of the place.



Arthur English, the old executioner eaten away by the dipsomania, should have been called to carry out the killing, but everyone remembered with horror the clumsy execution, earlier that year, of Tomasina Sarao. It had resulted in the outright beheading of the convict, whose obese body had been "disemboweled like an old mattress punctured by wear" and emptied of its internal organs. The horrific image, peddled by the guards, despite the

recommendations of the judicial authorities ashamed of such blunders, had struck the imagination of all Canadians.

English-Ellis had been retired, so to speak. But he had at least escaped the fate of the French executioner, Simon Grandjean, whom a furious mob had lynched three centuries earlier, following an involuntary beheading in Dijon in 1625; which was paradoxical since, at that time, beheading was reserved for aristocrats, while commoners had to submit to hanging.

In Canada, to end Elizabeth-Anne's life, another volunteer was accredited as an "*acting executioner*". His name was Samuel Edwards. As the courtyard of the Woodstock prison was curiously open, a scaffold was erected under a courtyard in order to conceal from the general public the horror of such a death that the abolitionists could have instrumentalized for the benefit of their cause. Elizabeth-Anne, finally resigned to die after her vehement protests of innocence, spent her last hours on earth praying to God to wrest forgiveness for her crimes. She probably hoped to coax him not to be received too ruthlessly by crossing the famous and disturbing Gates of the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Preparations for the hanging had been completed the night following Ottawa's official declaration that the 56-year-old woman was being denied Clemency for reasons not expressed:

"His Excellency the Governor General in Council is unable to interfere in the sentence of the Court of Justice,

*in the case of Elizabeth Tilford, now sentenced to death.
Signed, E.H. Coleman, Under Secretary of State."*

The hangman Edwards, who arrived the previous Thursday in Woodstock, had supervised the erection of the scaffold and tested with sandbags the proper functioning of the hatch. Earlier in Toronto, Elizabeth-Anne's attorney, Frank Regan (no doubt held back by the guilt of his inability to save this woman's head) had issued a statement about Mrs. Tilford in which she claimed her innocence but declared herself "resigned to death."

When, under police escort, she crossed the prison yard at 00:58 to the courtyard, she appeared weakened, trembling and about to fail. We would be too! On this freezing December 17th, impertinent snowflakes whipped his flaccid, bloodless and stalked face. Two hundred people, silent and motionless in the cold, moaned silently outside the walls. Inside the penitentiary courtyard, a few officials and the Coroner's jurors were patient, petrified and thoughtful, trying in their tormented minds to revise the evidence and proofs of Elizabeth-Anne's guilt to convince themselves that she was really guilty and that they had not committed any error of judgment, irreparable, irrevocable, which would haunt them until their last breath.

The hanging was carried out at 0:59 precisely, in all the rules of this painful art, now disappeared in most of the so-called civilized countries. It took place without any technical fault, for the executioner on trial had been careful not to drown his existential anguish in the vapors of alcohol. Twenty minutes after the hatch slammed, the doctor declared that Elizabeth-Ann's heart had stopped

beating. The rope was cut and the body placed in a padded coffin.

The crowd of 200 people languishing in the frigid street, had not even realized that the execution had taken place in accordance with federal law and the Constitution of 1867. When they saw Mrs. M.J. Bridgestone, the prison guard, leave the Penitentiary Center, everyone understood that the convict had given her soul back to Jehovah.

At about 1:30 a.m., the Coroner's jurors were put in the presence of the body to verify, according to law and tradition, that the body of the dead woman was indeed that of the convict and that no sneaky substitution had taken place. At 2:30 a.m., the same night, Elizabeth-Anne's body was quietly buried in Woodstock Baptist Cemetery, in the company of one of her victims, her second husband William Walker. No member of her family had bothered to accompany her to the threshold of her execution, but a semblance of a funeral ceremony was held in her memory at the cemetery.

Thirteen people including journalists and a prison guard came to wish her a good trip and a friendly "So long!"²⁷. A journalist wrote the same day, since midnight had passed: Woodstock, December 17th. "Elizabeth-Anne was executed in the courtyard of the county prison at 0:59 a.m. Death was instantaneous. Journalists were not allowed to witness the execution. She was executed by the Hangman Sam Edwards, the sheriff's acting hire. A small crowd of citizens gathered outside in front of the high

²⁷ •The origin of *so long* (goodbye!) is uncertain. Some bring the expression of German, Swedish or even from Germanic Yiddish (*sholom*).

The Elizabeth Tilford Murder Case

walls. Police officers circulated them. An hour before the execution, the 56-year-old woman, three times widowed, and mother of nine children, four of whom were alive, was fainting in her cell. She was still able to walk to the scaffold."

The Elizabeth Tilford Murder Case

THIS FORM MUST BE FILLED FORTHWITH WITH THE DIVISION REGISTRAR OF THE DIVISION IN WHICH THE DEATH OCCURRED BEFORE A BURIAL PERMIT CAN BE ISSUED.

WRITING PLAINLY WITH UNPAINTED INK. THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD.

AGE should be stated EXACTLY. PHYSICIANS should STATE CAUSE OF DEATH IN plain terms, so that it may be properly recorded. If death is caused by an accident or disease, the cause should be given in full. If death is caused by an infection, the name of the disease should be given. If death is caused by a malignant tumor, the name of the tumor should be given. If death is caused by a heart attack, the cause should be given as "heart attack". If death is caused by a stroke, the cause should be given as "stroke". If death is caused by a cerebral hemorrhage, the cause should be given as "cerebral hemorrhage". If death is caused by a cerebral thrombosis, the cause should be given as "cerebral thrombosis". If death is caused by a cerebral embolism, the cause should be given as "cerebral embolism". If death is caused by a cerebral aneurysm, the cause should be given as "cerebral aneurysm". If death is caused by a cerebral infarction, the cause should be given as "cerebral infarction". If death is caused by a cerebral hemorrhage, the cause should be given as "cerebral hemorrhage". If death is caused by a cerebral thrombosis, the cause should be given as "cerebral thrombosis". If death is caused by a cerebral embolism, the cause should be given as "cerebral embolism". If death is caused by a cerebral aneurysm, the cause should be given as "cerebral aneurysm". If death is caused by a cerebral infarction, the cause should be given as "cerebral infarction".

FORM 6
PROVINCE OF ONTARIO
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF DEATH

240
026715

PLACE [County of] **OXFORD** Township of **CRONYN** House No. **37**
DEATH: II in City, Town or Village **WOODSTOCK** (Name) Street (Name)

If in hospital or institution, place name: **TILFORD** (Surname) **TYRRELL** (Given name or names)
Residence **37 CRONYN ST.** (Exact place of death)

2. Sex **Male** 4. Racial origin **ENGLISH** 5. Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced (check the word)
MARRIED (Province or country)

6. BIRTHPLACE **ENGLAND** (Province or country)

7. DATE OF BIRTH **NOVEMBER 10TH 1899**

8. AGE OF DECEASED **35** Years **4** Months **22** Days If less than one day old
hrs. **00** min. **00**

9. OCCUPATION OF DECEASED
(a) **TEAMSTER** (Trade, occupation or kind of work)
(b) **None**
(c) **In Canada (if an immigrant)**

10. LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (in years and months)
(a) At place of birth **4 YRS.** (b) In province **YEARS.**

11. Name of father **WILLIAM TILFORD** (Province or country)
ENGLAND

12. Birthplace of father **ENGLAND** (Province or country)

13. Maiden name of mother **MARY**
ENGLAND

14. Birthplace of mother **ENGLAND** (Province or country)

15. Name of Informant **MRS. T. TILFORD**

Address **37 CRONYN ST.** Relation to Deceased **WIFE.**

16. Place of Burial **WOODSTOCK, ONT.**

BURIAL PERMIT issued by
Name **J. W. M. LEVIN** Address **69 LIGHT ST. WOODSTOCK, ONT.**

Filled at **4:00 p.m.** this **23rd** day of **April**, **1936** Month **APRIL**
Date **1936** (Year)

Have the Disease or injury which, or is death from Violent Causes, state 11 below
and Name of physician who made the diagnosis or who certified the cause of death
and write "born" and "died".

Date of Burial **APRIL 30 1936.**
Address **69 LIGHT ST. WOODSTOCK, ONT.**

Name **C. B. REED** Address **69 LIGHT ST. WOODSTOCK, ONT.**
Date **April 2, 1936.**

Marie-Louise's Achille heel.

The Marie-Louise Cloutier Murder Case, 1940

The poet Georges Brassens wrote and sang: "*Heaven had provided her with a thousand baits that make you catch fire as soon as you touch it.*" This could have been supprimer le numéro de pagethe description of the beautiful Marie-Louise Cloutier, except that it was not necessary to touch it to ignite.

Men are so thoroughly programmed by Nature, anxious to populate the planet, that all the male inhabitants of *Saint-Méthode-de-Frontenac*, a small village in southern Quebec, in the *Eastern Townships*¹, became feverish when they saw her passing or wandering by. Unfortunately, this toponym typical of the Quebec terroir has now disappeared. The village of Saint-Méthode-de-Frontenac and several neighboring villages with such endearing names, were regrouped in 2001 under the awful name of *Adstock*.

If the attached photo does not seem to live up to the description, it is because it was taken at the time when the beautiful Marie-Louise was waiting with a sigh of despair in the death row, waiting for her capital execution. These living conditions were not likely to exalt her charm and bloom her beauty. Even her smile had disappeared in the terror of the imminent death. This criminal case has fed

¹ •So called because of their geographical location east of Montreal.

the provincial and even national Judicial Chronicle by its sulphurous and romantic aspects, embellished with a few touches of witchcraft, evil, philters of love, libertinism, and naughtiness. Enough to constitute today an excellent television soap opera to distract a blasé audience. But in the already ancient days of the *inter-world-wars* period, such ingredients were likely to lead to the gallows the headlining actors, of which only Camille Branchaud², the new Official Executioner of Canada, would benefit.



The men of Sainte-Méthode loved the black and fascinating eyes of Marie-Louise Cloutier, a beautiful young girl lively and full of life. As soon as she had reached puberty, the suitors flocked in. Like an ovule besieged by a thousand dashing and frenzied flagella, she only had to let herself be conquered and penetrated by, not the most seductive postulant, but the one who offered her the strongest assurances of prosperity... of *happiness* she believed.

In 1918, when this beautiful creature lined up only 17 springs, the Great War ended, and the proud warriors returned from the battlefields of France and Belgium. This was the moment when Marie-Louise gave her heart to Vilmont Brochu, a young farmer of 20 years. He was the one who had been able to offer her the best guarantees of ease and comfort for the life that opened before her.

In a few years, the two spouses, who seemed strongly in love with each other, built a remarkable

² •Camille Branchaud was a pseudonym. He replaced John Ellis in 1936 as official *Executor of the High Works of Canada*.

prosperity, through work and deprivation. Then, during the following decade, they consecrated the same energy to destroy what they had so laboriously built. This is what most couples usually do. Their personal relationship, which had been inflamed in constant efforts to enlarge and fortify their agrarian paradise, was then totally consumed, as devastated as the large city of Caen after the useless Anglo-American bombings³.

The passion for success had bewitched them so much that their love, like their life, had slipped through their fingers like the fine sand of the Gaspé beaches or Saint-Am-broise Beach in Manitoba. They even forgot to make an heir to share and collect their happiness. This is a sure sign of a desire to destroy the couple, a kind of suicide. So much so that, as soon as *the Great Depression* hit America, another depression began to erode the love that had hitherto made Marie-Louise so happy. Every morning, she woke up like a stranger in a business relationship. Where was the happiness of loving that swelled her heart and lungs when she once settled on her husband's farm. What she had taken for romantic inclination had perhaps only been a need for security now fulfilled.

This happiness that Marie-Louise believed eternal, was fragile as a butterfly's wing, and disappeared in the air of the time, cloud swept by the bad wind of the midlife crisis. They were both very surprised: Vilmont to no longer be loved while he himself, always stimulated by

³ •After the Normandy landings, at the end of the Second World War, the Anglo-American bombers killed 70,000 French women and children by their imprecision: bombing from high altitude for fear of the Flak (the German anti-aircraft artillery). By comparison, the Nazi V1 and V2 killed fewer than 10,000 Englishmen in London.

Nature, adored his wife like a drug addict. As for poor Marie-Louise, she realized, to her great dismay, that her feelings of love for Vilmont no longer existed... if they had ever existed. But there were the material and real estate goods, the ultimate glue that kept the couple together.

Marie-Louise would never have agreed to give up this farm on which she had sweated for so long, and without which she would have been nothing but a despised and homeless poor woman. She knew that this real estate was primarily part of her husband's patrimony, according to the Napoleonic *Civil Code* in force in Quebec. She was so keen to keep everything, that she even came to play her life in the *Double-or-Nothing* of Life and Death. And she lost.

Anxious to rebuild a viable solution, the couple nevertheless managed to stay, cahin-caha, on the path of routine, struggling with the vicissitudes of their existence worn out by the years. Perhaps Vilmont consoled himself by thinking that all couples stumble in this way in the life's potholes, but that you just have to stay the course to avoid tumbling into the deep ditch? Continuing in this way, this man could every day savor the presence of his dear Marie-Louise. She evoked the lost paradises of the flesh, smell her natural perfume of a woman who once exhilarated his ever-awakening senses. He still guessed under the rags of work her generous forms of which he knew every fold, each beauty curve.

Riches that he could only visit by though, with his mind, if not possessing them, dreaming every evening that he traveled these well-loved hillsides and valleys, these

bulges, these rumps where he loved to loiter so much, but now hostile. Taken with pity, Morpheus, the god of Dreams, filled him with fantasies that compensated for his loneliness.



Marie-Louise Cloutier Priv. Coll.

Vilmont was a real *workaholic*. But this was precisely his Achille's heel, because the most beautiful Virtues, pushed to the extreme, become vices. Instead of taking care of his dear wife and trying to redo his conquest as in the good old days of their engagement, Vilmont decided at that time to occupy his short off-season winter days by driving a cab.

Perhaps Vilmont just wanted to breathe in a bowl of oxygen outside the couple and give his wife the same privilege. He then began to spend most of his time transporting customers. In fact, he was, proportionately, like those little millionaires who spent their lives working like convicts, without taking the slightest pleasure not to lose a few dollars, and who find themselves in the evening of their lives, rich in a few millions, but who do not know how to enjoy the fruit of their money. They keep their heritage

religiously intact as they would keep *the Golden Calf* of the Bible. They can only take pleasure in depriving themselves of almost everything to add a few pennies to their mountain of dollars every night. They refuse to get used to the idea that their children will squander this fortune in a few brief years.

Such was Vilmont, except that he had not even taken the time to procreate any heir to enjoy these riches. In February 1936, his wife complained bitterly that she was alone to carry out the winter work of the farm. On that occasion, Vilmont made a serious mistake with far-reaching consequences. It was, in fact, the same fault as Isidore Poirier of Saint-Canut, 40 years earlier⁴. He hired a cousin as an agricultural helper in order to lend a hand to his wife. She was still beautiful, but deeply affected by the famous mid-life crisis and the concern to please and seduce.

Like the poet anguished by aging and death, Marie-Louise probably sighed a similar melody:

*Lucie, Lucie, hurry up! We live,
We die only once!
And we have no time for anything
That it's already the end⁵!*

Ah! Beware of cousins! Hiring a cousin to help on the farm was probably the worst solution. It was downright locking the fox in the henhouse. In this case, the young fox

⁴ •See Chapter 2 of *Crimes & Punishments of Canadian Women* BOOK ONE, by Jean-Claude Castex, p.49ff.

⁵ •Pascal Obispo de Bergerac. Song title : *Lucie*.

too dashing was called Achille Adolphe Grondin⁶, a solid 36-year-old boy. And as Vilmont was good-natured and even naïve, it took him no less than a year to realize that the handsome cousin Achille was becoming truly indispensable to Marie-Louise, without however being able to surprise them directly in an overly revealing position.

—He will end up taking them "panties on the ground"! foreshadowed the sorrowful spirits, happy to laugh at this expression of the Québec terroir which did not lack relevance.

That was what happened. When Vilmont realized it, it was already too late. Undoubtedly, the illegitimate love affair between his cousin and his dear wife was not at his first spasms. Taking the bull by his horns, Vilmont immediately drove this cousin off the farm; but he could not expel him from his wife's heart. He had definitely corrupted his entire relationship with his wife. For humans are so made that they immediately descend into excess of violence when they can no longer hide their turpitude under a mask of candor and peaceful innocence.



To the amazement of our naïve farmer and to his great dismay, Marie-Louise packed her personal belongings, and on February 12th, 1935, taking advantage of the absence of her husband who had left for a taxi ride, she surreptitiously left the marital home with the help of the

⁶ •Achille was mistakenly referred to as *Adolphe*, his middle name, in File 0276 of Persons Sentenced to Death in Canada from 1867 to 1976, Department of Justice fonds consulted by the author, now at the National Archives, Ottawa.

cart of Jean-Baptiste Gilbert was a reserve lover who drove her to the railway station. She went to live in Magog⁷ on the edge of the peaceful Lake Memphremagog from which this city of 15,000 inhabitants took its Indian name. She stayed with friends and rented a room before finding a job in a textile factory. Skilfully, she was careful not to go and live with her lover Achille Grondin so as not to infringe on the Quebec Civil Law of that time, which was then very much imbued with Catholic Canon Law.

Discreetly, however, she contacted her Achille to ask for money to start legal separation proceedings. Anxious to rectify her reputation, which was beginning to smell of sulfur in the countryside, she told anyone who wanted to hear her that she had left her husband because he was jealous *for no reason*. "All the more, she accused, "*he himself spent his time running the galipote in his taxi*"⁸." On his return from work, Vilmont Brochu was, of course, very sorry to have had his wife, whom he loved, gone with the wind for an ever more devouring passion, as a result of their marital tribulations. He went to visit her to urge her to return home. In vain. He encouraged Marie-Louise Cloutier's relatives to shower her with letters to lecture her. No result.

Vilmont Brochu then threatened the acting lovers Achille Grondin and Jean-Baptiste Gilbert, to simultaneously sue them for a strange infraction... *alienation of*

⁷ •Nothing to do with the Magog of the Bible which designated the northern territories in relation to Israel, populated by uncircumcised, therefore *bad* people. Religion is almost always a source of racism or discrimination.

⁸ •*Run the galipote* " run the petticoats", look for gallant adventures.

affection. It was a curious law of the *Duplessist Era*⁹, intended to strengthen public morality by giving cheated spouses some "judicial arms to defend themselves". Faced with this sword of Damocles, which threatened the freedom of those she loved dearly and simultaneously, Marie-Louise agreed to return home and discuss the situation with her husband; otherwise she risked imprisonment and subsequent stays in jail in the event of a recurrence.



Achille-Adolphe Grondin
Archives Nationales

During these negotiations, she jumped at the opportunity to impose, as an *initial condition*, the immediate interruption of the legal proceedings brought against her two lovers. She also demanded that her husband make an irrevocable and definitive choice between his job as a taxi and agricultural work. She hoped with all her heart that he would refuse, but to her dismay, her husband accepted everything.

He went so far as to undertake to refrain from interfering in the "innocent relationship" of the beautiful Marie-Louise with the tender Achille or with his substitute Jean-Baptiste. Moreover, he agreed to immediately stop *suspecting her* of anything. Which was a shame! A Sunday philosopher claimed that "if life is a death trap, Love is the antidote and the counterpoison!" Clearly, he had not read that file. Vilmont's sentimental blindness to his pretty wife

⁹ •Maurice Le Noblet Duplessis directed the destinies of Quebec from 1936 to 1959, with an interruption during the Second World War.

was really the direct cause of his death. One cannot help but think of Isidore Poirier who was the victim of the same sentimental slavery.

Before the beautiful velvet eyes of the woman he idolized "without common sense", as they said in the village, Vilmont's will and discernment were destroyed. His hormones forced him to accept everything she demanded, instead of breaking this toxic relationship that would poison him —figuratively and literally— and brought the one he cherished to the end of a hemp rope, which he would certainly never have wanted.



As his wife demanded, in order to reconnect with co-habitation, Vilmont abandoned the farm and rented a house in Saint-Méthode. As a result, with the consent of his wife who wished to keep him away from the farm, he opted for the sole profession of taxi driver. Of course, he immediately interrupted the legal proceedings against his wife's lovers. Consequently, the two gallant men could continue to alternately and with a total impunity perform the perfect love, and coo the sweetest tunes on their Magic Flute.

Instead of wisely finding his salvation in separation and flight, as he should have done, Vilmont Brochu, implacably enslaved by Love like a midge by the silk of a spider, had thus decided to concede victory all along the line. Only his *return to grace* in the heart of the one he loved passionately mattered to him; at least he believed in this illusion. One can imagine, at this point, that the beautiful Marie-Louise felt only repugnance for this man who

accepted to be so fooled in the sight and knowledge of the whole village. As a result, she decided to get rid of him, one way or another.

She had believed that her draconian conditions would definitively free her from the steel straitjacket that her overly passionate husband had become. How could she have imagined that he would accept the unacceptable by allowing her to see her two lovers without protest? No doubt he himself had never believed that he would one day crawl so low, in cowardice and spinelessness! But we don't know ourselves! The Ancient Greek used to say Know thyself, *Γνῶθι σεαυτόν*. Passionate Love is often a ruthless slave trader.

As one notorious feminist so aptly put it, the sex of women "transmits to its heir an immeasurable power... But this power that *it*¹⁰ embodies place *it* inevitably under the disapproving and worried gaze of man. [This female sex] feeds men's fears, provides them with pleasure and birth, stirs up desire as much as hatred... Sometimes exiled, cursed, scolded or consecrated, mutilated as much as embraced, *it* will always have something to reproach *itself*. *It* dictated *its* laws, and *its* desires to the history of humanity, even though some men, politicians or religions tried to prescribe to *it* their wills, their fantasies, their prohibitions¹¹."

In those Duplessist times, men brandished the rigor of the laws to "control" and "control it". In vain! Only Sharia violence will be able to destroy the tremendous vital

¹⁰ •"It" represents the sex of the woman.

¹¹ •Diane Ducret, *La chair interdite*, Albin Michel, , Paris, 2014. Text of cover 4

momentum of women because this religious legislation is based on inhuman torture and horrific death by stoning.

Faced with the unexpected capitulations of her humiliated husband, Marie-Louise, not knowing what to invent to get rid of him, remained distraught for a moment. Should she scrape her shoes on a corner of the sidewalk, as is usually done when you can't get rid of the mud or any even more inconvenient substance? She analyzed the situation with lucidity and audacity.

How to break up with Vilmont without imprisoning her two lovers! Impossible! She had the choice between annulment of her marriage, legal separation, and outright murder, because divorce did not yet exist in Quebec¹². There was no question of imagining a satisfactory reason for the annulment of the marriage, because for that it was at least necessary to find some semblance of reason and agreement. If she separated from her husband, she could never marry her dear Achille on pain of falling into canonical excommunication and bigamy punishable by prison. Achille would be immediately incarcerated.

Today, the total disappearance of religious constraints among Quebec Catholics makes this behavior totally incomprehensible and even grotesque. But in the past, excommunication was a heavy punishment. It really banished the condemned from village society and communities. No one dared to associate with the reprobate for fear of becoming a pariah himself. On the other hand, if she killed him, paradoxically, her crime could be forgiven in

¹² •Divorce was really facilitated and widespread in Canada in 1968 and in Quebec in 1969.

confession. Thus, she avoided canonical excommunication and could crown her new love with marriage, after serving her sentence... provided that the penalty is not capital. This was the perverse consequence of the sacrament of penance.

Opting purely and simply for assassination forced at the time the candidate for crime to consider its most predictable consequences: *the gallows*. The positive aspect of this choice was that, from a strictly judicial point of view, women were executed approximately only once in four, compared to one in two for men¹³. The lottery was as dangerous as Russian Roulette with a barrel fully loaded with balls... except one. The choice of poisoning as a weapon of crime would likely allow her and her lover to survive. Because this kind of crime, which is now so easy to prove, was much less so at the time because of the practice of embalming (thanatopraxic).

If the criminal had been able to immediately destroy the body by cremation or aquamation¹⁴ as criminals do today, impunity would have been assured. But, as stated above, incineration was still prohibited by Catholic Canon Law, and aquamation did not yet exist. So, she leaned towards this option, *poison*, and began to inquire assiduously about the physiological effects of deleterious toxics in the body of a bulky husband. Among Marie-Louise's

¹³ •Of the 1481 death sentences — including 50 women — during the Confederation, 710 were executed (48%): 699 men (49% of men) and only 11 women (22% of women). [From *La ballade des pendues, La tragique histoire de trois Québécoises pendues pour crime*, by Jean-Claude Castex, Presses de l'Université du Québec, Québec, 2011. p.5]

¹⁴ •Aquamation consists in dissolving the flesh of a dead body in chemicals. The bones are then crushed, ground, and then handed over to the survivor in an expensive urn.

friendly relations in Magog, a young undertaker later recalled the beautiful Marie-Louise's particular interest in embalming in general, and more particularly in post-mortem skin reactions, produced by the action of a poison ingested before death, on a body later embalmed with the usual chemicals. The attentive reader will not fail to remember Cordélia Viau who asked her life insurance agent if the premium on the head of her dear husband would be paid to her in case of death by poisoning or violent killing!

Widespread embalming of the dead was fairly recent in Canada. He came from the United States where it had been made mandatory by Congress to transport the killed of the Civil War, under the pressure of the powerful lobbies of Funeral Directors who saw in this act, as useless as it was expensive, a most lucrative activity. The Magog undertaker attributed to the great intelligence of the young woman and to her universal spirit, Marie-Louise's interest in the chemical reactions of embalming.

This adorable and beautiful girl was really interested in everything! It was not yet known that women's brains were as sophisticated as men's, if not more so, even in the field of mathematics and applied sciences. What would the young embalmer have thought if he had known that since her return with her husband, the beautiful Marie-Louise with eyes of velvet, tortured her mind to find the most effective and least dangerous way for her to send her husband to hell, in order to enjoy the freedom to live her life as she pleased while keeping the Vilmont property for herself?



Towards the end of June, the young woman borrowed from her neighbor, Madame Jolicoeur, two spoonfull of lead arsenate to treat her... tomato plan. This neighbor with such a charming name used *arsenic* or *green-of-Paris*, as everyone called it at the time. Marie-Louise turned over one of the two unused spoonfuls that evening. Green-of-Paris is the common name for *arsenic* or *copper* or *lead arsenate*. It is a dazzling but highly toxic blue-green chemical.

As stated above, it was sought after as a paint pigment, rat poison, insecticide and finally as a blue dye for fireworks. This very luminous pigment had been put into fashion by Parisian painters who prepared their own oil painting. By handling such poisons, Cézanne developed a severe diabetes known today as one of the chronic symptoms of arsenic poisoning. Monet's blindness and Van Gogh's neurological disorders were most certainly linked to the use of green-of-Paris, but also to poisoning with lead and mercury pigments, chemicals that usually combined with green-of-Paris.

The colors were so dazzling and the tones so truculent that artists braved death to keep them on their palette, just as, today, athletes choose to dope to death for a few days of eternal glory in every Olympic Games. Life is well worth a moment of Glory, unlike Richard III of England, who would have exchanged the glory of owning his kingdom for a horse that would have allowed him to save his precious life¹⁵. Whatever the case, the charming Grondin, wearing his little felt hat of an irresistible seducer, had in the meantime made some secret visits to his mistress

¹⁵ •§ Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

Marie-Louise at the home of Madame Pomerleau, a complacent neighbour who abandoned them a bedroom as a love nest.

In July, the same gallant (Grondin) bought through a certain lady Gilbert, 500 grams of arsenic from Mr. Bisson, a local restaurateur, in order (he claimed), to treat the squares of red tomatoes with what he planned to cover his vegetable garden, in the spring of 1937. One shudders at the thought that such a large amount of arsenic could hang around in a restaurant kitchen. It was precisely at the beginning of 1937 that Vilmont Brochu's excellent health began to spoil after toasting in honor of the New Year a few glasses of beer in the company of his wife and his servant, the "charming" cousin Achille Grondin.

In addition to the sour stomach that his wife's arsenic gave him, he almost immediately felt unpleasant bad cramps. In the small town of Magog, rumors of devilry began to rise and develop into fabulous urban legends. It was claimed that Achille had paid a gypsy witch to cast a bad spell on his rival, the taxi driver Brochu. Canadians were well acquainted with the vagrants called Gypsies, who roamed the powdery paths of the New World in the summer to trick the farmers who feared them so much.

In the Québec countryside firmly harnessed by the *Ten Commandments of Moses*, such a crime of poisoning seemed so implausible, so extravagant, so incredible even, that one could only imagine evil spells cast out by some devious Gypsy. This explained in particular the stomach cramps which, since the beginning of the year, made Vilmont's life totally unbearable, but also the rage for freedom of the young woman "*who did everything to lose her soul and her eternal salvation*", thought the most devout ladies.

Marie-Louise seemed possessed by *spring madness*, like calves and young females springing up in the meadow after spending the interminable Canadian winter in their barn; they gambol, jump and frolic as if they were disoriented, after eight months of sequestration.

—*How could she sacrifice her Eternity for the sole purpose of enjoying a few years of earthly life?* the good people thought.

Seen from the perspective of religion, it was certainly an unreasonable and even absurd choice. Most true believers renounced happiness on earth —so brief in time—to obtain eternal bliss. Logical choice! The rumours of devilry in the Beauce countryside were not unfounded. Marie-Louise confessed during her trial that she had indeed consulted a Dame Taillon, a seer and an unlicensed medium but very connected with the ethereal *Underworld of Spirits*. Dame Taillon had told her that her husband would die of unnatural cause and that she would shortly remain a widow before remarrying a blond man who would bring her happiness and health. Clearly, the diviner, the clairvoyant relied more on gossip than on Alcyoniid nymphs.

Marie-Louise added that she had immediately imagined that Achille Grondin was the man that Destiny reserved for her in this prophecy, even if his hair was not blond. This famous "*Bearer of Happiness*" was *chestnut* and already infused her with pleasure and joy by natural means.

—*It is unfortunate that the seer did not see that it was also going to bring her the gallows if she poisoned her man,* commented later gossips and rumors from the

countryside, mingled with some jealousies of all these mairivaudages and unbridled wanderings.

It is curious to note that not once was Vilmont's gastric discomfort and sufferings attributed to poisoning, neither by Vilmont himself nor by anyone else. In fact, poison will be only evoked when Marie-Louise shows a little too much eagerness to marry her lover, after the Great Departure of her spouse. Despite this, every inhabitant of the county knew a real or fictitious anecdote concerning Marie-Louise's multiple escapades with Magogois, and Vilmont's alleged infidelities with Magogoises.

In the sad austerity and misery of the Great Depression and the throes of the Spanish Civil War, this exciting adventure was more popular than Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in their new musical that had just taken off "*On the Wings of Dance*." As if all these rumors weren't enough to make Vilmont's life even more grueling, he fell ill again, shaken again with violent stomach pains. Unaware of the real cause of these persistent ailments, the very old doctor a little crude, to whom Marie-Louise brought him for consultation, prescribed some innocuous drugs that seemed to temporarily calm his suffering. But the respite was brief.

Five days later, the crisis returned more painful, crueler than ever. Sporting a pitying face, Marie-Louise led him this time to Thetford-les-Mines, to another old man, the old *medicastre* Delage, with his more or less forgotten knowledge. He, too, administered some medicinal recipe, pot-au-feu style with basil or oregano, against an intestinal infection. Of course, Marie-Louise should not be counted on to choose the best doctors in Beauce.

After spending some time in Thetford-les-Mines, Marie-Louise and Vilmont rented together, to echo their

Entente Cordiale, a small house in Saint-Méthode in which they moved on 17th of May 1937, abandoning the farm to their farm helper. Mrs. Brochu stated during the trial that "*she no longer loved her husband at that time, and that she preferred Grondin to him who was good for her*, as Marie-Louise said.

On July 12th, Brochu drove a client named Mathieu to Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce with his taxi. By 3:00 p.m. he was back. His wife served tea to the two men, her husband and her lover. As Vilmont had not eaten since the day before, he prepared a full meal for himself before going to the home of one of his brothers-in-law. This dinner allowed Marie-Louise to discreetly administer to him enough arsenic to finish him, once and for all.

Taking advantage of a moment of inattention from her husband, she sprinkled his beans with arsenic. Around 5:30 p.m., during this visit, Vilmont suddenly felt sick. From that day on, his health steadily worsened. On July 16th, accompanied by a friend and his wife, Vilmont went to consult Dr. Roberge de Saint-Éphraïm, who could not determine the nature of the evil, although later, enlightened by the newspapers, he denounced gastric intoxication, and even, more precisely, poisoning caused by food.

In fact, the old doctor got his diagnosis from the press. As his illness did not seem to show any sign of improvement, Vilmont Brochu decided to go to Thetford-les-Mines to be examined by Dr. Delage who had him admitted for observation at the local hospital. There, he treated him by himself. Despite this increased care, Dr. Delage's totally negative diagnosis was considered very worrying, as was that of Dr. Roberge. Vilmont remained for three days in observation in this hospital, without food contact

with his wife, and when he was finally released, the critical period of his illness was over. The effect of arsenic had diminished. The patient seemed to be on the road to recovery.

On this occasion, Vilmont jumped at the chance to spend a few days of convalescence with his sister in Thetford-les-Mines before returning home around the 27th of July. During this period, he mentioned to anyone who would listen that his health was constantly improving, and that, as a result, he expected a complete and definitive recovery. But he forgot that health is fragile, especially in the vicinity of a poisoner, and that, in any case, life itself is an adventure that always ends badly, sooner or later.

As reported by witnesses at the trial, his wife did not waste her time during Vilmont's absence. Reducing her Sunday jaculatory orations to the bare minimum, the beautiful Marie-Louise took advantage of her Sundays to, in the biblical sense, get to know better her dear lover. She met him at least twice at Madame Pomerleau's home, a generous neighbor. But not forgetting her husband, she eagerly awaited him to move away from the protected hospital environment (and her sister), so that she could settle his fate freely, without being subjected to indiscreet surveillance.

Exasperated, presumably, by the health of her husband who was recovering as soon as the poison was no longer administered to him on a daily basis, and probably eager to prepare the "relapse" that she was cooking in her head, she recklessly announced to several witnesses that her husband's health was deteriorating *continuously*, that the doctors had told her that he was probably going to die *soon* because he no longer had any hope of even a partial cure. She obviously took her desires for realities.

The three charlatans who had examined the victim—Dr. Roberge, Dr. Delage and Dr. Roy—categorically denied on the witness stand that they had made such a peremptory diagnosis in the presence of Marie-Louise. It then became obvious to the jurors that, through her comments, Marie-Louise was preparing minds for the inevitable and imminent death of her husband.



On August 1st, Vilmont, who had regained almost all his health since entering the hospital, fell seriously ill again as soon as he was put back in touch with his charming wife. The *Extreme Unction* (called today *the Sacrament of the Sick*) was administered to him by a priest, and his family rushed to his bedside as soon as he had to be confined to bed. He never got up! He lay there, on his couch of agony, and as if by miracle, Marie-Louise began to show her husband, so sick, a renewed affection very particular. Everyone—and especially Vilmont, whose love and naivety never failed—began to hope for a happy exit from the marital crisis, in the very hypothetical event that he recovered a less vacillating health.

At times, Marie-Louise, her gaze full of loving compassion, tenderly took in her left hand his right hand, very thin, almost skeletal, which her dear sick husband extended to her insistently. With the other hand, she helped him to swallow "*the comforting broth that was going to cheer him up.*" Visitors aware of the real facts, were shocked to see this emotional and touching scene of marital tenderness revived. It was as touching as the painting entitled *Tenderness* showing a dying man in the arms of

his compassionate wife¹⁶. Ah! The numerous and assiduous prayers of the whole village had, without a doubt, moved the pity of the Master of All Things who had granted a renewed loving happiness to this man struck by Fate!

Probably to atone for her past blunders, Marie-Louise seemed determined to hold the hand of her dying man until his last hiccup of life, before the very Gate of Eternity. There only, she would let go off his hand sharply for fear that the clenched fingers of her hated husband would take her with him to the Kingdom of the Dead. Thus, one could only testify to his eager dedication and loyal generosity. But she was seriously mistaken because, in this tight embrace, her black onyx eyes expressed no more love than those of a hyena who squeezes between his powerful jaws the neck of an antelope

One night, after the last visitor of the evening had left, she slipped between Vilmont's weakened fingers a pen holder and a form that he could not read as he was in pain. It was the transfer of her life insurance policy in her favor to her. Vilmont's sister, who lived in Thetford-les-Mines, had been the replacement beneficiary since Marie-Louise had abandoned her marital home. The dying husband eventually initialed the document, at the same time signing his own death warrant, because Marie-Louise was only waiting for this transfer to finish blowing the last flame of his life. But what she also didn't know was that she had just made him sign, by the same gesture, her own death and that of her lover.

¹⁶ •Painting created in 1984 by Denise Rafenomanjato, Mendoise born in 1926 and died in 2003 who was actually called Denise Sastourné. The painting can be admired on the internet and at the end of this chapter.

From that moment until his last breath of life, on August 16th, Vilmont Brochu endured the most cruel suffering, the most heartbreaking agony. His wife wanted to finish this killing as fast as possible. She stayed constantly with him, letting go his hand only to prepare the medicinal recipes prescribed by the doctors and her own. She administered all her lethal potions to him herself. And, while her confident husband drank to the dregs the chalice of arsenic, writhing in atrocious torments like a damned gehenna, the beautiful Marie-Louise dried her tears of crocodiles and adjusted her hair to go, on two or three occasions, to her love nest at Madame Pomerleau's house, in order to fornicate with her lover Grondin.

Vilmont Brochu finally left his world of unbearable suffering on August 16th, when the Camarde finally took pity on the human cluster that was barely breathing. A spasm more violent than the others put an end to his abominable agony. His soul abandoned his suffering body as one gets rid of a *ball and chain* or a *straitjacket* torn between the canines of a wicked dog. He had been so tortured by health problems for six or eight months that his death was perceived with relief as the normal result of this diabolical disease: *a perverse spell*. But are you going to try to prove this evidence? You might as well try to prove the existence of God in scientific terms without falling into burlesque, like the American Creationists!



It is usually said that a villain is never totally bad. It must be the same with fallen angels and demons. The agony of Vilmont Brochu had been so inhumane, the crime so awful, the criminals so relentless, so devoid of compassion, that the demon Beelzebuth himself was no doubt

outraged. And seeing the assassins rejoice in having managed to show this cold efficiency, he decided to inspire them with gross errors that would precipitate their fall into the trapdoor of the scaffold so that he could recover them as soon as possible in his infernal Satanic Kingdom.

Vilmont Brochu was buried on August 19th after receiving a first-class embalming of which the 127th Pharaoh Ramses II himself would have been jealous. It can be said that Marie-Louise did not skimp on the price. All traces of arsenic absolutely had to disappear. In Canada, embalming essentially consists of connecting a *suction* pump to the calcaneus (the Achilles' heel), and a pump *repressing* in the occipital artery behind the neck. The blood is thus brutally expelled from the body. Sometimes a clot or *coagulum* clogs the opening of the pumps, and the explosion that occurs then defiles the embalmer and embalmed with bloody speckles, as during the failed hanging of Tomasina Sarao.

After draining the body of its blood, a chemical cocktail—the last cocktail on earth—replaces, in the network of arteries, veins, and capillaries, this liquid of life become unnecessary¹⁷. It is an expensive and perfectly useless process, but the rich lobby of the Funeral Directors has managed to impose it in popular customs, and it has become perfectly criticizable not to deliver its dead to the fingers banded with gold and diamonds of professional embalmers. We know that, in the United States, it is the financiers (the merchant's lobbies), which direct all the country's life.

After being carefully made up in order to conceal from family and relatives the rictus of suffering and the

¹⁷ •Blood, placed in a container, is placed in the coffin with the body.

stigma of the desolate tortures that had been inflicted on him by the woman he loved, Vilmont was quickly buried in the sacred land of the small cemetery of Magog. On the afternoon of the funerals, the impatient Marie-Louise went to her Life Insurance Company to collect her \$500 premium, about \$200,000 today; a fortune in Beauce. That was certainly a big mistake.

Barely a short week after the burial, the lover Grondin came to settle in the house of the deceased, put on his slippers and wrap up in his sheets to whisper to his widow, between two passionate assaults, how much he loved to enjoy in peace the 25 years of sweat and pain of its laborious predecessor. What an unspeakable pleasure must find the sloth to parasitize the heritage of another, without having poured the slightest sweat!

From the beginning of September, Grondin and Marie-Louise, who had been living together for a few days already, asked a priest to celebrate their marriage... "to respect morality and avoid critical rumors." To their surprise, they were categorically refused. A second priest also rejected the same request. But the *nouveau-riche* now had the means to convince the least scrupulous matchmakers.

On October 15th, the marriage could take place in due form, and the couple left the village to settle on the *Grondin Farm* located in the *Tenth Row*¹⁸. It was there that in November of the same year was found the almost empty arsenic bag, which had been bought at the very beginning of gastric disorders, as well as the box of *green-of-Paris* as bright as the vast Prairies at the spring snow melting. The police also found a salt mixer that contained the same

¹⁸ In the countryside, Rows are roads or streets.

poison mixed with ash. *Sorcery!* some Beaucerons suggested.



Thus, by a sleight of hand worthy of Robert Houdin, and by the virtue of a few grams of "*succession powder*", the *Brochu Farm* had become the *Grondin Farm*. Vilmont's untimely death suddenly placed the accomplice Achille Grondin in the front line in the *four-poster bed* of the beautiful Marie-Louise with large onyx eyes of magnificent hourie. But the lover soon realized that, if he was not careful, he himself was about to be supplanted in the large linen sheets, embroidered with the initials *M L C.*, He certainly knew that he was not the only one to appreciate the charms of his mistress. But libidinous pleasures are as addictive as the worst alkaloids and the need grows as fast as taxes!

Achille knew, however, that most of the candidates who jostled at the fleshy gate of this earthly pleasure, were only passades, occasional supplements for Marie-Louise. One of them, however, the famous Jean-Baptiste Gilbert, had his free entrances. It was the same one that the deceived husband had pursued in Court, jointly with Achille Grondin. What? This profiteer of Gilbert who had not even soiled his hands in the crime, now wanted to draw some pleasures from the thin young woman and her fat pactole?

The indignation of Achille —whose *heel* was *jealousy*— was growing day by day. There was no question that he, Achille Grondin, had "pulled the chestnuts out of the fire" for another profiteer. It is difficult to despoil a thief. This is well known. Achille thus met this rival in

front of a good "forty-ounces¹⁹" and an old Bible worn by arthritic fingers; all provided by our cunning companion who, like professional players, always cheated in one way or another.

The two rivals undertook by oath on the Bible to scrupulously respect the vagaries of a draw. After emptying their bottle of gin to lubricate their brains and thus facilitate negotiations and sleight of hand, they pulled the beautiful Marie-Louise to *the short straw*. Of course, as was to be expected, Achille emerged victorious. The only ones who died, as a result of this brilliant short straw, were the alcohol-soaked geraniums that were near Achille's chair, and, three years later, the winner himself. The drunkard believed that he had honestly lost. Achille kept the young woman and fortune for himself... for his greatest misfortune! As popular wisdom still says: "that day, he put the rope around his neck."



Mathilde Brochu, Vilmont's loving sister, found the haste of Marie-Louise shocking, who had barely waited for her brother's corpse to cool down before remarrying. It is likely that her disappointment was increased by the transfer of his brother's life insurance to Marie-Louise. For her, the pill had been bitter to swallow when she realized it. Many Magogois and Magogoises were also moved. Murderous rumors began to fly low between the Appalachian hills of the Eastern Townships²⁰, like bald eagles

¹⁹ •Approximately 1,200 cm³ of juniper alcohol, at 45°.

²⁰ •These 6 Appalachian hills are called *Monteregan Hills* because of the main one, Mount Royal, in the center of the city of Montreal. They are volcanic necks,

which the Americans import from Canada into their country to replace their avian symbols exterminated by pesticides.

Very cautious despite everything, in order not to suffer the same fate as her peaceful brother, Mathilde waited for the two triumphant accomplices to disappear into nature to wallow in their honeymoon and forget their crime in the delights of the flesh always unfulfilled. She then jumped on the Montreal train to confide her suspicions — and those of her entourage — to Lieutenant-Colonel Philippe-Auguste Piuze, head of the *Sûreté du Québec*²¹.

With the verbal agreement of the Minister of Justice, whom he immediately consulted, the officer promised to have her brother's body secretly exhumed. This initiative, which would be illegal today, may not have been yet. It was a disconcerting time for us, a time when we still preferred to favor the cause of the victims rather than that of the criminals. Three nights later, Vilmont's body was surreptitiously unearthed by the police, who took advantage of the anonymity of the night. One can imagine the nocturnal painting under the smoking torches, as disturbing as the play of shadows and light in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*²².

The body was immediately sent to Montreal for careful examination by Professor Jean-Marie Roussel, a medical analyst with the Department of Justice, one of

geologically different from the Appalachian Mountains. "L'Estrie", because this region is located east of Montreal.

²¹ •He was Chief of the Provincial Police of Quebec from 1937 to 1940.

²² •From William Shakespeare.

Canada's leading experts in forensic medicine. The autopsy, as well as the analysis of the stomach and viscera contents, revealed a considerable arsenic quantity. It was obvious that Vilmont Brochu had died by absorption of this nitrogen over a long period of time. Marie-Louise had really managed to defeat her male²³. Taking into consideration the fact that, during the last month of illness, the victim had eliminated part of the poison absorbed, by vomiting, enemas and very frequent natural evacuations, the doctor came to the conclusion that "*the symptoms of the disease manifested all the characteristics of poisoning by repeated doses, administered at irregular intervals. The first dose of arsenic was likely ingested on July 12th.*"

The medical Coroner therefore confirmed that "*Vilmont had died of subacute poisoning²⁴ by arsenic taken in small doses, at irregular intervals.*" Comparing, the police discovered that the arsenic found in the victim's liver and intestines was similar to the poison the assassins had borrowed from neighbors at the end of June, similar to that bought by Achille Grondin in July, and also to that found at the home of the same Grondin and his new wife in November.



²³ •Arsenikós virile (ársēn male, strong + -ikos-ic). Comment already mentioned in these pages: allusion to the etymology of the Greek word arsenikon which means 'victory over the male'. Green was called the color of the Devil because many comedians of the Middle Ages also died after wearing arsenic-dyed costumes.

²⁴ •The adjective *subacute* refers to a pathological condition or disease whose symptoms are of low intensity but are prolonged and reduce only weakly. [Larousse Dictionary.]

Rumors of proven poisoning spread like bush wild-fire in the village of Saint-Méthode where the newlyweds lived. The two scoundrels were by chance at the home of a neighbor, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Carrier. The latter evoked before the two assassins the rumor of poisoning that ran the country like lievreteau (vagging hares)²⁵, probably to realize first-hand the reaction of the couple. To the carriers' surprise, Marie-Louise commented on the rumor:

—I am not saying that they will not find any at all²⁶, but it would be necessary to have seen it administered to him. I'm not afraid. I don't think they will find any. As for me, I didn't give any!

This curious comment was of course repeated with the inflection of voices and the appropriate mimics, by Madame Carrier, one of the 125 witnesses in the trial that followed. On the occasion of the Preliminary Inquest known as the Coroner's Inquest, the investigators Gallibois and Giroux went to the Grondins' home, to issue them a *subpoena*²⁷ which ordered them to appear in Court as witnesses. Seeing the gendarmes appear, Marie-Louise naively commented:

—Did they find anything? If they find any, they must not have found a lot!

But by infinite luck for Dame Justice, the First Class embalming that Marie-Louise had offered to her late husband as a viaticum —an embalming is supposed to

²⁵ •The lievreteau is in Canada the name of baby hares. His cry is le vagissement.

²⁶ •Arsenic.

²⁷ •*Subpoena*: injunction or obligation, from the Latin sub (sous) and poena (penalty) = obligation to obey under penalty of... Summons or subpoena.

camouflage the totality of the effects of the poison—proved insufficient. My goodness! One can no longer trust these thanatopractors who save on chemical ingredients!

Great were the surprise and disappointment of Marie-Louise and Achille when the police came unexpectedly to arrest them in the middle of their honeymoon, while they believed their secret buried for eternity and already almost entirely decomposed by the bodily corruption of the victim, or at least erased by the thanatopraxia of the local embalmers. They thought their crime would go totally unpunished... on earth at least. The very thrifty lovers had barely begun to erode the small fortune left by the death of the naïve Vilmont. In fact, without them realizing it, the rowboat of their lies was watering from all sides, and it was child's play for the investigators of Piuze to accumulate irrefutable evidence that convinced the judge that an Assizes trial proved relevant and even indispensable.



Marie-Louise Cloutier's Assizes Trial actually began in Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce on September 20th, 1938, while in Europe Hitler annexed Czechoslovakia without a hit. The Honourable Justice Noël Belleau presided, before a jury, over the *Court of King's Bench* in its Criminal Jurisdiction. The King Prosecutor, Noël Dorion, nailed with virtuosity the young woman and her lover to the pillory of the Prosecution. The brilliant Rosaire Beaudouin defended them with no less brilliance and enthusiasm, as it is true that trials are an intellectual chess game between two men,

with, as the ultimate stake —"as a checkmate!"—, the head of the accused.

One hundred and twenty-five Prosecution witnesses marched at Dorion's request. They exposed with a thousand more or less crunchy details the marital and extra-marital history —the *soap opera*— of the Cloutier-Brochu couple as well as Marie-Louise's Affairs with not only Achille Grondin, but all her other gallants, successive and sometimes simultaneous.

The King's Prosecutor tried to bring the lover and accomplice Achille Grondin to the stand, but, —Disappointment!— the Defense attorney objected to him testifying against his own wife since the two assassins had taken the precaution of marrying immediately after the crime. The judge was obliged to comply and submit to the Procedure; reluctantly, because he had first hoped to use his testimony to break Marie-Louise's defense. It is curious to note that a judge who was supposed to enforce the Procedure was the one who tried to violate it.

The inhabitants of Magog also learned with astonishment of the clauses of the negotiations thanks to which Vilmont had been able to encourage his wife to return home. Enslaved to his love and hormones, the poor man had outright abandoned all honor, all self-esteem, all respect for himself. The doctors and neighbors, for their part, came to list and describe the different phases of the poisoning that followed one another over a period of eight months.

The famous Doctor Roussel was also able to confirm that the arsenic detected in the tissues of the corpse was of the same nature as that found in the vials of the accused:

—*The dose found in the viscera constituted about a tenth of a normal dose, absorbed at once by the victim.*

The Defense lawyer hastened to put this argument on the line:

—*So, in your analyses, you did not find an amount equal to a dose taken at once?*

—*It's understandable! Some of the poison was eliminated by natural means, by diarrhea, by urine. As a result, the dose found on analysis is a little lower than the absorbed dose; and if the death had occurred long enough after the poison had been taken, it might not have been found at all on analysis.*

—*And you think you can still draw conclusions?*

—*Poisoning can still be concluded based on the symptoms and lesions found at autopsy. I still keep my opinion on the cause. In this case, it is poisoning by a dose found on analysis corresponding to about one-tenth of the lethal dose.*

—*Can the survival of the patient have any influence on the elimination of the poison?*

—*Yes sir, as I mentioned. Survival can eliminate the poison. A survival of more than 15 days, or more than 20 days, is sufficient to allow the total elimination of a dose of poison, in some cases.*

The young embalmer, all dressed up in his black suit and starched shirt, recounted, for his part, how Marie-Louise had shown great interest in the neutralizing or dispersing action of embalming ointments on poisons. He added that he had not been surprised by the accused's request for Embalming, because the care given to the make-up and treatment of the body with chemicals, further concealed the effects of the poisons.

Other testimonies even went so far as to evoke the spells and devilries that each party had tried to use without noticeable success, either to bewitch the husband and cause him to die in an apparently natural way, or to disenchant the wife by freeing her from her all-out lubricity. It was considered at the time that normal women were naturally frigid, even if the most clever ladies did not have their equals to simulate the pleasure by a few sighs at crucial moments²⁸. The old vicars even advised it to their followers to satisfy their husband's ego. It must be recognized that today's excision is still less acceptable than disenchantment, which had the same purpose of frigidifying women²⁹.

²⁸ Read the *Cordelia Viau Murder Case*, page 52 in Book One of *Crimes and Punishments of Canadian Women*.

²⁹ •Excision, which is a totally inhuman and barbaric primitive requirement, has been well on the verge of coming fashionable in Europe and the United States to cure the ladies of female masturbation. Women's historian Diane Ducret claims that clitoridectomy, i.e. the removal of the clitoris, was fashionable in England by doctors "against the exalted masturbation" of women. It was the Englishman Isaac Baker Brown who popularized this curious treatment among English women, as a cure for the "vices of onanism and lesbianism" at the end of the nineteenth century. This curious fashion came in the United States but did not manage to maintain itself for long. In fact, one in three women ended up in the morgue after this operation. Diane Ducret, *La chair interdite*, Albin Michel, Paris, 2014. p.87.

To the great regret of the public, Judge Belleau refused to elaborate on all these crunchy intrigues concerning witchcraft, black magic, and naughtiness, which at times bordered on bawdiness. Faced with this avalanche of Prosecution witnesses, the accused's situation became desperate. She who had believed, throughout the eight months required to prepare the assassination, that she would succeed very well in deceiving everyone, had to face the facts: the situation was becoming serious and even critical for her. That is why, from September 30th, until the evening of October 3rd, 1837, Marie-Louise herself came to the helm to lead a furious rearguard fight, a fierce combat of honor, we would say if honor had its place in this assassination. She fought like a lioness, with surprising courage, the verb high and the inflamed hand like an Olympian torch. She vigorously and categorically denied having poisoned her ex-husband. This poor man so regretted had simply died of gastric problems. Which was absolutely undeniable!

On the 7th of the same month of October, the jurors listened with a religious attention to the Indictment exposed by the King's Prosecutor and the Pleading of the Defense attorney. The two Ciceros surpassed themselves in a revival of virtuosity, one to have the murderer acquitted, and the other to hang her. The brave jurors, totally lost by the undeniable oratorical qualities of the two specialists in mystification, asked permission to go and pray in a nearby church to implore the divine Enlightenment. God no doubt had mercy on them, since in less than an hour they found the answer to their questions; unless it was the parish priest of Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce who transmitted

to them the Holy Will of God, as it is done in all the cults of the world.

Marie-Louise Cloutier-Grondin was found
GUILTY.



The trial of the accomplice and lover Achille Grondin followed immediately, on November 11th. Noël Dorion and Rosaire Beaudouin once again rode their most beautiful oratory jousts, seductive as white alezans. Achille's verdict fell on November 26th, 1938. The Crown had won. Achille was also found guilty by the new Jury.



However, the fiery Defense lawyer, Me. Rosaire Beaudoin, was not a man to let himself be dismantled by a guilty verdict. He immediately appealed after combing through the 1,600 pages of the long cohort of 125 testimonies. Me. Beaudoin wished to detect, in the sequences of events, the technical errors or inevitable contradictions on which had been based the reasonable certainty used by the jurors to convict the accused.

The Court of Appeal therefore considered the case of *Marie-Louise Cloutier, Appellant, v. the Respondent "His Majesty King George the VI, King of Canada and the United Kingdom, Emperor of India and elsewhere,"* whose coram³⁰ included Justices Galipeault, SaintGermain,

³⁰ •Coram, Latin word meaning, *in front, in front of, in the presence of, with.* [Gaffiot Dictionary Online, 1934]. The coram indicates in the presence of which judges or magistrates the decision was taken.

Saint-Jacques and Savard. Court of Appel's lawyer stated³¹:

—I come to the conclusion that in this voluminous case a trial "tendentiously against the appellant" was conducted³². In my opinion, she did not have an "according to the law" trial³³, and the least we can say, after what is known about the Appellant's conduct throughout her husband's illness, is that, as the judges put it — the evidence is consistent with both the innocence of the accused and her guilt."

And he concludes that poison crimes are often sources of miscarriages of justice, so it is better to have several guilty people at large than one innocent convict.

—I believe³⁴ that... the facts have not been presented as they should have been, that the evidence has not been reported as it should have been, that the learned judge has made inferences that he should have refrained from making, that he himself considered Grondin's actions as those of a co-accused, that he has drawn conclusions from them, that in general terms the conclusions he draws are not those he could put before the jury, not constituting permissible comments, that he did not generally give the accused the benefit of his explanations, that he attached considerable importance to innocuous facts, often childish, brought by witnesses, which had no significance in the

³¹ •Page 42 of the Minutes of the Call. National Archives, Ottawa.

³² • i.e. *biased* in watered-down terms.

³³ •According to the rules of law. *In English in the original text.*

³⁴ •Page 29 in the Minutes of the Appeal.

case, were not part of the res gestae³⁵, which he interpreted against her all the facts and gestures as well as the statements of the accused, even those far from the date of the crime, having no relation with him, that the jury could not have been very impressed and influenced by the remarks of the judge, and that, again, the accused has the right to complain."

In addition, the defence lawyer argued before the Court of Appeal Judges, "*The Crown illegally wanted to hear Grondin... But Grondin could not be a witness against the accused³⁶.* Indeed, Marie-Louise had become his wife but we still used all her statements that had preceded her marriage. Even more serious, according to the lawyer, the "*evidence provided could not justify, in the circumstances, the verdict that was pronounced. This evidence, adduced against the Appellant, is all of circumstances³⁷.*" All this evidence is circumstantial and therefore cannot lead a woman to the gallows. For "it is not enough that the evidence is compatible with guilt, it must be clearly incompatible with innocence³⁸."

Finally, rejecting all these Byzantine quibbles, subtle artifices intended to throw equivocation into their minds faded by the venerable age, the judges of Appeal, all appointed to these lucrative functions quite considerable by

³⁵ •*Facts and gestures.* The *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (The Acts of the Divine Augustus) is the political testament of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, in which he offers a first-person account of his deeds and gestures. Lawyers, like priests and doctors, often used Latin to mask their ignorance and also to impress the common man.

³⁶ •P. 38 Minutes of the Appeal, National Archives, Ottawa.

³⁷ •Ibid., p. 2.

³⁸ •Ibid., p.5.

political skulduggery³⁹, maintained the death penalty against Marie-Louise and Achille. It was necessary to rush as quickly as possible to the Supreme Court.



The Defense attorney was not the only one to lead a fulminant guerrilla against the execution of the two assassins. Multitudes of letters, telegrams and telephone calls intersected in the cloudless azure sky of La Belle Province. There were, of course, the usual *Abolitionists of the Death Penalty*, but also those who were convinced of the innocence of the convicts, and those, even more numerous, who refused to let a woman, *Progenitor of Humans*, be executed, even if she had not given birth despite multiple unsuccessful attempts.

Many of those who opposed the execution of a woman preferred to suggest that they believed Marie-Louise innocent so as not to appear biased in spirit. The double sentence of Judge Noël Belleau had condemned the couple of murderers to receive the same sentence, namely "hanging by the neck until death ensued, at Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce, on the third day of March 1939."

Then, crowds of Jarrets Noirs (Black Hocks), a facetious nickname of the Beaucerons whose hollow paths were not the best maintained, joined the acrimonious vociferations of the opponents to prohibit this sacrilegious killing. No way to hang a woman in Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce! Never ever! Among the letters of opposition to this execution of Marie-Louise, here is one—starting from

³⁹ *Wheeling and dealing or political intrigues.*

the principle that it is better to solicit God than his saints—addressed directly to the King of England⁴⁰ who, by a singularity of History, also happened to be King of Canada for a few more decades. The spelling errors of the *terroir* have not been preserved in English translation:

"Montreal, January 3rd, 1940, To His Majesty the King and the Queen. My Good Sovereigns. At the beginning of this year, allow me to address a request to you. Oh! I know the thing almost useless, because it's very serious. However, I address your good heart, and in memory of your trip to Canada, I ask you to abolish the death penalty of Marie-Louise Cloutier and A. Grondin. These unfortunate people are ignorant perhaps and this woman worked a lot in the place of this lazy man. She took good care of the dead and his father. Is-it the reward for all her work? We must have pity on her. Please pardon them with the assistance of the Governor in Council. Forgive me, I know my request is audacious, but still I allow myself to ask with God's help. I am a poor grieving mother who asks for mercy for them. [Signed] a mother of Canada, Mrs. Napoléon Parent, 5212 rue Chabot, Montréal.

If the king spoke French very well, although stumbling, the 5th underling who tried to decipher the letter probably did not understand a single word. It is quite obvious that the first name of the signature was already not likely to coax the inflexible (or perhaps indifferent) King George VI but rather to trigger stomach sourness. How

⁴⁰ •The king was then George VI since 1936, the year in which his father Edward VIII had been forced to abdicate, officially to marry a divorced American, but in reality for active underground Nazi collaboration with Hitler.

could one of his subjects have such a provocative Christian name?



The Appeal had no effect. Marie-Louise Cloutier, meanwhile, was tired of these sterile battles to save her life. Also did she ask the Minister of Justice to stop procrastinating and to execute her "as soon as possible":

"Refuge of Notre-Dame de la Merci, Sillery, Québec, January 11th, 1940. Honorable Mr. Lapointe, Minister of Justice, Mr. Minister. Mr. Beaudoin, our Counsel has warned my husband and I in recent days that he had asked us for the *Application for Clemency* for a Commutation of Sentence. I, today, ask you in grace to leave the sentence as it is fixed on February 23rd because I am not able to spend my life in a penitentiary. I am so well disposed to appear before God, I look forward to being sent to Heaven. There, I will no longer suffer. Hoping that you will take my cause into consideration, I thank you in advance. Your obligatory Marie-Louise Grondin née Cloutier. [Stamp:]

Received by the Revisions Service of the Ministry of Justice on January 15th, 1940.



Everybody was eagerly awaiting the Supreme Court's judgment for Marie-Louise who, as one can imagine, was languishing behind her steel bars, hoping for (and fearing) death that was not coming. Unfortunately for her, and against all odds, everything was rejected.

The outcry continued in Saint-Joseph-de-Beauce. Certainly, everyone considered Marie-Louise a murderer or murderess of the worst kind, but a woman could not be allowed to be executed within the sacred limits of the parish; man, okay, no problem... but a woman, never! Like children, women should not be held fully responsible for their actions. Seen from the top of the twenty-first century, there was something shocking about this difference, this lack of fairness, regardless of our position on the death penalty. As a result, the judge transferred the prisoners to Quebec to keep them away from the Beauce populace on the verge of insurrection.

A new date of execution for both spouses was set for February 23rd, 1940. At the same time, the granting of the Right to Vote to women was announced at Quebec⁴¹. While waiting for the day when the decision of "Justice" could be executed, the two convicts were finally transferred to Montreal, one to the prison of Bordeaux, and Marie-Louise to the women's prison of the rue Fulham. The Bordeaux prison had opened its doors in 1914. Its metal gallows, visible on cover one of this book, had put an end to the life of a total of eighty people, including three women: Tomasina Sarao in 1935, Marie-Louise Cloutier in 1940 and, later, Marguerite Pitre in 1953.

At that time, the officiant executioner of Canada was a Québécois, known under the pseudonym Camille Brachaud. His real surname has always remained a well-kept secret. This man had started his career as a prison guard.

⁴¹ •In fact, it was on February 20th, 1940 that the 21st Quebec Legislature opened, whose Speech from the Throne of Lieutenant Governor Eugène Fiset announced the granting of this famous Right to Vote to women.

He was a tall executioner, like "the Grand-Ferré". Following the tradition of all the Executors of the High Works, he showed a strong penchant for the bottle. His pseudonym concealed him from the contempt that his fellow citizens of Québec would have given him. Alcohol helped him forget his indignity that was too destructive for his own person. He had replaced the English executioner, Arthur English who had (probably) committed suicide eight years earlier, after having exhausted in three years of idleness a huge capital of pension⁴² and found that no Canadian sheriff wanted to give him a performance contract anymore.

In fact, all the executioners committed suicide by alcohol. Branchaud, on the other hand, was so efficient in execution... of his work, that his services were solicited throughout Canada.

Camille Branchaud therefore showed up on Monday morning, according to his habit, at the door of the Bordeaux penitentiary where the double executions were to finally take place. He had put on his old prison guard uniform. He held in his left hand a small black suitcase that contained the brand-new ropes whose nooses he had previously carefully checked.

In Bordeaux, he did not have to erect a wooden scaffold, since a steel stem had been installed on a balcony on the 3rd floor (2nd floor). All this gloomy metal ensemble more or less rusty seemed a monstrous animal that climbed on the facade of one of the inner courtyards of this star-

⁴² •Arthur Ellis-English died, consumed by alcohol in 1938, and ended by suicide, at the Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc Hospital in Montreal. He was buried in Mount Royal Cemetery.

shaped prison, under the horrified eyes of hundreds of sinister windows barred with steel. This fabulous, hungry animal seemed to try to enter the cells to devour the inmates, as can be imagined by observing the cover illustration.

These permanent gallows included a balcony pierced by a double hatch capable of engulfing the convicts two by two. These two large hatches consisted of two steel plates mounted on hinges. They opened to the sides to hit with great bang the "bumpers" that can be seen on the cover illustration of Volume II. Up close, these hatches resembled one of those *garbage disposal chute* installed in the industrial garbage dumps of yesteryear. It was enough to place the people to be destroyed on these steel plates and crush a piston with a kick. Our meticulous and washed out society was in an instant rid of all these cumbersome slags.

Two smaller balconies flanked this platform, one for the chaplain who could thus exhort the desperate condemned to repentance, until the ultimate moment, just before his encounter with his God or with his Nothingness. The other small balcony was for the Executioner, from where he could trigger the simultaneous opening of the double hatch.

As soon as he arrived at the prison he knew so well, the hangman Camille Branchaud never failed to oil the hinges to avoid their shrill moans and rusty sobs. He then checked the proper functioning of the hatch with sandbags as convicts. Inmates locked up all around could see and hear death slammed multiple times at the risk of losing what little spirit they had left. Having done so, Monsieur

de Bordeaux, as several hangmen liked to call themselves, no doubt to add to their name a hinge more noble than those of the traps, was going to examine the condemned who were to die the next day at dawn.

Roger Duguay, a guard in Bordeaux, wrote, "To be hanged, a man had to be in good health⁴³." The convicts were then measured (height and neck), and carefully weighed in order to calculate the length of the rope. The long-saut was not to decapitate them but to break their cervical vertebrae. A rope too short would kill by strangulation and suffocation but this was not the goal because suffering was not part of the judge's sentence, as in the centuries of yesteryear.



In France, before the French Revolution, hanging was applied without any hatch, by simple suffocation. Aristocrats were decapitated by axe. Rope and axe had been replaced by the guillotine which had the advantage of giving death without physical suffering (but even more moral suffering). In Britain, hanging by suffocation was suppressed 70 years after the French Revolution, by the hatch and the long jump, which were developed (by the

⁴³ •Duguay, 1979, p.44.

English) in the *Green Erin* where judges hanged in abundance the recalcitrant Irish (Catholics) in the 1850s.

But get back to the penitentiary of Bordeaux where Camille Branchaud was acting. *The medical examination completed, explains the former guard Roger Duguay, the condemned was led into the antechamber of the gallows "composed of two cells separated by an iron door; it contained only a bed and a table where the condemned person could eat and write. The room adjoining the main cell... served as a chapel."*

In the center of this miserable ‘chapel’ stood an altar where the final Mass was celebrated in a “heavy, anguishing silence, so complete that one could almost hear the heartbeat of the condemned⁴⁴.⁴⁴” Some were eager to receive communion and others preferred a solid breakfast as a viatic for eternity.

On February 23rd, 1940, shortly after midnight, Branchaud was in this Montreal prison de Bordeaux⁴⁵, ready to put to death the couple of assassins. Meanwhile, world war was raging in Europe. Hitler's army used its weapons to violate Belgium's neutrality in order to invade its main European enemy, France⁴⁶. England, for its part, fearing that, in retaliation, *British Petroleum Co.* would be attacked and destroyed by the Arabs in the oil fields of the

⁴⁴ •Ibidem.

⁴⁵ •The name Bordeaux came from the village of Saint-Joseph-de-Bordeaux which had changed its name in 1906 to become Bordeaux. This village was annexed to Montreal in 1910 but the name remained attached to the neighbourhood.

⁴⁶ •If Mein Kampf is to be believed. The plan to invade Belgium was called Plan Jaune or Fall Gelb.

Middle East, forbade Jews to acquire Arab lands in the Holy Land.

In Tibet, the very young Tenzin Gyatso, born in 1935, was enthroned with great pomp as the 14th Dalai Lama. As for the Soviet Union, Comrade Stalin who was the most prominent citizen—and the most criminal—was rubbing his hands because he thought he was clever enough to have taken shelter from the Nazi ogre. After the non-aggression treaty he had secretly signed in 1939 with Hitler, he had just completed this agreement of criminal complicity on February 2nd, 1940, by signing with the same monster a commercial Treaty intended to thwart the Anglo-French maritime blockade. Stalin was certainly the main *cause of war* of the Second World War because he allowed Hitler to engage in the war in the West without fear of a backlash attack, on two fronts.

On this freezing February 23rd, 1940, Marie-Louise Cloutier was far from worrying about all these distant problems. She had just been taken out of the women's prison and transferred to Bordeaux to die. Shortly after midnight, the hangman Camille Branchaud⁴⁷ went to extract the first convict from his cell. It was Achille Grondin who had the honor or misfortune to die first. In fact, the hanging of the two lovers was not done simultaneously and side by side, as had been that of Cordélia Viau and her accomplice Samuel Parslow. Branchaud chose instead to hang them successively, one after the other, at the same gallows, like Marie Beaulne and consort. The ultimate

⁴⁷ •The name *Branchaud* originated in Charente-Maritime. It has been worn in Quebec since the eighteenth century.

cruelty would have been to hang the first in the presence of the other, but this was not possible that day, and, in any case, it was done only exceptionally in the presence of a woman. Curious scruples!

Branchaud therefore tied Achille's arms in his cell and made him cross the threshold of the French window that overlooked the balcony-gallows. He grabbed him tightly to prevent him from committing suicide by throwing himself over the balcony guardrail. There was no question for him that his career that was beginning could be sabotaged by a blunder of this kind. Because a death by suicide would have caused serious legal problems. In such a case, a few centuries earlier, the judges would not have hesitated to hang the suicidal one in order to satisfy the Court Decision to the letter.

In 897, we even saw a pope, Stephen VI, dig up his pontifex predecessor (Formosa) to judge the corpse clothed with his papal ornaments, and condemn him to be thrown like waste into the Tiber River. This papal action was not really a model to follow.



It was cold, even very cold. In the triangular court-yard of the Bordeaux prison the guests waited for, warmly wrapped in large fur overcoats, their heads covered with a dark felt or a thick chapka of beaver, fox or sable; ear guards lowered and tied by a stuffed chinstrap. All officials had been specially selected to attend the executions. Two long open coffins were waiting very gloomy to receive the bodies of the two convicts still alive, under the balcony, near the grand staircase.

This late hour had therefore been chosen to avoid the presence of the curious who usually climbed in trees, on roofs and electric or telephone poles in order to satisfy their pronounced taste for these scabrous shows. Here, the star-shaped prison buildings were far too high to lend oneself to this vice. Only the inmates of the front cells could follow this horrifying spectacle with their eyes by clinging to the steel bars, as if not to lose their minds. Perhaps they thought this atrocious spectacle was unworthy of a civilized nation. Perhaps they also realized that their own crimes were unacceptable to human beings.

Soon Achille appeared on the balcony, securely grabbed by the giant hangman who garroted his legs so that he could not hold back at the hatch edges. Next to him stood the priest who had spent the funeral vigil in his company. He prayed in a low voice, standing on his small side balcony. The executioner Branchaud put on the hood on the man's head, then the rope around his neck, squeezed the noose on his left ear and when everything was ready, he suddenly turned to the assembly fascinated by the one who was going to die. Branchaud observed them for two or three seconds, then suddenly pointed his index finger of his right hand at the opposite façade, and when the assistants had looked away, he set off the hatch with his foot, which slammed gloomily against the metal buttoir in the freezing night.

When the eyes of the officials returned to rest on the scaffold, the condemned man had already disappeared by the gaping hatch, and his body was agitated, shaken by disorderly jolts under the balcony, above the stairs. Everyone felt a sense of frustration against this sardonic

hangman. It was his childish way of playing a bad trick on all those voyeurs whom he despised with the same force that he felt underrated by them. It prevented them from focusing on the final moment. He explained that his facetiousness —rather misplaced in such circumstances— was intended to ease the attention of the too tense audience. Clever justification for not appearing a vicious torturer who played with people's nerves!

A huge clamor punctuated by the metal shock invaded the inner courtyard of the prison. This was the usual way of the inmates to protest against the human Justice that they found so inhumane towards criminals. They forgot that they themselves had been unfair to their own victims. All these detainees shouted their solidarity with the one who had just crossed the small door, and above all they freed themselves from the suffocating pressure that strangled them. And all these noisy protests reverberated in the six courtyards of this star-shaped prison. Sometimes this agonizing rumbling lasted until the early morning and died like the ephemerals and vampires at the first light of day.

Under the starry sky of Montreal, the bell of the star-shaped prison of Bordeaux sounded the death knell. But only the Montrealers who lived in the surrounding streets heard it. The seven blows stood out in the thick, dry air of the freezing night like a funeral message:

*Oyez! Oyez! Honest citizens!
The killer joined his victim.
You can sleep easy, now, good people!*

About fifteen minutes after the slamming of the metal hatch, the body of the one who had been Achille

Grondin was declared lifeless by Dr. Bruneller after searching the fleece of his chest with his browser stethoscope.

The executioner then disappeared into the adjoining cell where Marie-Louise was waiting, terrified. She probably felt like she was living a live inhuman nightmare and was probably going to wake up in the early morning and say: "*Oh what a horrible dream I had! Let's go drink a little cappuccino at Café du Coin to forget all that!*" But that would not be the case.

The condemned woman appeared with dignity. From this high perched balcony, she could have apostrophized the executioner as Mary Blandy once did, to recommend to him:

—*Sir, Do not hang me too high, for the sake of decency*⁴⁸!

Branchaud tied Marie-Louise's feet, carefully put on her hood and tightened, around her thin neck which had seduced so many Magogois, the 18^{mm} diameter Indian hemp rope. But this time, no one got caught up in the ridiculous mystification of the executioner who only amused himself. Everyone saw her plunge into the trap of Eternity with emotion and even... great pity. And everyone had to dig into his memory to remember the circumstances

⁴⁸ •"Gentleman, do not hang me too high, for the sake of decency!" Mary Blandy died in Oxford (England) on 6 April 1752 for poisoning her father a year earlier with arsenic. Mary was rich and only daughter but her father (very racist) refused to let her marry a Scotsman (William Cranstoun) otherwise he disinherited her. She had been very spoiled, young, and could not give up the family patrimony out of love for her Scotsman.

of the horrible death of Vilmont Brochu to chase away like a sinister intruder this anguishing pity.

The charivari, which had for a moment weakened, resumed more beautifully until the early morning, like a fanfare of protest intended to escort the beautiful Marie-Louise to the Heavenly Jerusalem. The prison's assistant doctor, Wilfrid Brunelle, declared her dead and wrote a *Certificate of Execution of the Sentence*. Sheriff Louis-Philippe Caisse and Prison Governor Alfred Legault signed the *Sheriff's Declaration*.



In the midst of the screams mixed with insults of the inmates who had witnessed the execution, the death knell sounded again, *ten* spasms that vibrated long and sadly in the icy air; matte shocks devoid of life. Insomniac Montrealers understood that a second human being had just died, a woman this time, struck by human Justice, so imperfect.

As soon as the day rose, we could see that the black flag of death flew on the roof of Bordeaux. The two bodies of the lovers were buried in unmarked, totally anonymous graves, that of the ostracized reprobates, who were not considered worthy of resting in the so-called sacred land of a Catholic cemetery, like the Infidels in Muslim cemeteries, the Goyim in Jewish cemeteries and the Outcasts among Buddhists.



No! The dead are no more equal than the living!



Denise Rafenomanjato, née Sastourné in Mende 1926;
died in 2003.

"It was as touching as the painting entitled
Tenderness showing a dying man in the arms
of his compassionate wife."

Revenge is deadly... for the avenger!

The Elizabeth Johnson Popovitch Murder Case, 1940

The Prussian philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche suggested that "in revenge as in love, woman is fiercer than man¹." What is it really? Of course, one could be persuaded of this by reading the uplifting story of Elizabeth Johnson who wanted to take revenge on a man and fell into crime when she lost control of her hatred.



It was 1:00 a.m. on the night of Monday, June 17th, 1946, when Elizabeth Johnson and her new husband Georges Popovitch unexpectedly entered the store of Louis Nato, a *baker and confiseur*² in the village of Thorold Sud, near Welland, Ontario. Nato was still at work as he was taking inventory of its stock of confectionery ingredients at the start of the summer season.

At 55 years old, this Slav by birth and Canadian by choice was living his last hours because he loved a woman, precisely this Elizabeth who had just entered his shop. He was well known in his entourage as a cheerful luron who

¹ •In his book *Beyond Good and Evil*, written in 1886.

² •Candy confectionery.

liked beautiful women. That was certainly not a most avowed trait³ in the austere post-war Methodist Ontario, especially at the end of a day as sacred as the Day of the Lord. Moreover, the spirit of Prohibition, which had dried up the Ontario throats to the point of making them as dry as the Arabian deserts, was not completely forgotten from the habits and customs⁴. The least picky Inhabitants in the field of the artificial Victorian morality, surreptitiously came to unleash themselves in Montréal. Quebecers did not complain about it. Quite the contrary!

A few brief minutes after this sudden break-in at Nato's *bakery & confiserie* (candy store), the trio got out and boarded Nato's car, a magnificent *silver-arrow* cabriolet⁵ of great luxury. An attentive and well-awake observer would have noticed that the atmosphere seemed highly tense between the three motorists, because this impromptu departure was nothing more than a hostage-taking that would end badly for the three of them. Louis Nato, the prisoner, took the wheel.

For snobby people, the Silver-Arrow cabriolet was the equivalent of today's *Mercedes-Benz E450 4MATIC S-Class Luxury Convertible*. A car that served as a "butterfly net", in other words a flirtation with pretty women to satisfy his eternal attempts to fill his loneliness, before the

³ •Certainly not the most *politically correct*, we would say today.

⁴ •Some Toronto neighborhoods remained banned from alcohol until the year 2000. The alcohol and wine monopoly remained in the hands of the Provincial Government. Quebec was not subject to Prohibition, even though alcohol was for a long time under a government monopoly, which produced enormous revenues.

⁵ •Pierce-Arrow was an American company from Buffalo, founded in 1901 and absorbed in 1938. Louis Nato's SilverArrow was an *old car* in 1946 but of *very high standing*.

ruthless age mutilated his vital momentum. At that blessed time, only the human body was subject to the famous *Programmed Obsolescence* that today destroys what we buy after a brief use, in order to force us to buy new. The sole vain purpose of this waste of earth's resources is to further enrich the billionaires who wish to lead the Club of the Richest people in the world in *Forbes Magazine*, or failing that, at least be in the Guinness Book.

The lady was named Elizabeth Popovitch but the *baker & confiseur* Nato knew her intimately as Elizabeth Johnson. He knew her very well since she had been for years his concubine, his common-law wife. That evening, Elizabeth took her ex-lover hostage using as a weapon of intimidation the Herculean stature of her new giant husband Georges Popovitch, another Slav, Serb from Yugoslavia this one, long established in Canada.

Louis Nato took the wheel, his forehead barred by a deep double wrinkle, further accentuated by the play of shadows and light of an urban lamppost. Elizabeth and Georges Popovitch took their seats in the back of the cabriolet, under the leather hood, in the sinister shadow sometimes broken by the rare streetlamps. In the back, the giant was behind the driver, the woman on the right. What had she threatened him with so that he would follow them in such a docile and resigned way? Perhaps they were discreetly pointing a gun at him. Possibly! Perhaps also the only threatening weapon was the impressive size of the new husband; almost two meters!

Georges Popovitch was an athletic and powerful man, with whom the charming Elizabeth felt in perfect

safety. In his company, she probably felt like those people who hold on a leash a huge pit bull, a threatening rottweiler or even a giant Great Dane, in order to see the frightened look of passers-by who politely move away.

She was wrong to feel untouchable, because even if this feeling of security rhymes with invulnerability, it is all the more dangerous because it predisposes to recklessness. No one is immune to the Law and Order in our country. Certainly, the rich have the means to afford the best attorneys and apologists, often able to acquit serious criminals who can continue their careers as outlaws. But, deceived by the intoxicating power of money, they come to exceed the limits, and consequently, the jaws of the Law close on their fingers, like a door in stormy weather, pushed by the wind of Justice.

This feeling of invulnerability that had inhabited Elizabeth since she lived with her Herculean husband, had given her the bad idea to shoot revenge of Louis Nato to make him pay *en bloc*, not one but several humiliations that had recently overwhelmed her with shame. First, she reproached him for having drawn from her, for several years, a thousand voluptuousness. She had generously watered this old man, repugnant to her, with all the delights of her young woman's body, in order to obtain from him the material ease which she lacked, for herself and to raise her children.

Elizabeth's legal husband, suffering from a deadly cancer, had finally freed her by taking refuge in a world where suffering is absent, at least if one does not take the wrong door because it has been claimed by sinister and

disturbing spirits that the Gates of Heaven are narrower than that of Hell. Finally free, Elizabeth had hoped to eventually persuade Louis Nato to marry her. This was her second humiliation that he now had to pay a high price. He postponed, always later, the marriage she longed for in order to obtain *absolute security*.

But absolute security means no barrier in case of bad behavior, because Elizabeth had long been a prostitute and the old man, who sincerely loved her, was fearful of her possible relapse into bad behavior. Since he obtained all the advantages of marriage without suffering the threats of a marital straitjacket, he did not want to cloister himself in an indissoluble union⁶. Such a renunciation would forbid them to frolic freely in the multiple delightful gardens of illicit pleasure. Absolute security is always harmful in Love.

The old man liked to be generous with her, but he knew full well that the slightest legal marital bond would force him to pay off all the debts she would accumulate in his whims. He should also maintain her and her daughters, even if she ventured to cheat on him with another man, in the same way that she had mystified her previous husband with him. No! That was not possible. To accept marriage one must fall into the trap of love; and even if he felt that he loved her, he was not yet sure that he had complete confidence in her to assume all the threats. And Louis Nato

⁶ •Indissoluble or almost. Divorce was not totally forbidden in Canada, but the Government granted it very sparingly. Indeed, only 3 (yes! three) divorces were granted to Canadian citizens between 1840 and 1867. Until 1968, divorce fees were so high that only the rich could afford it. In 1968, the *Divorce Act* allowed divorce for breakdown of the marriage with separation of more than 3 years, physical abuse, imprisonment of more than 3 years.

was probably not entirely wrong since Elizabeth was tirelessly pursuing her search to find a mentor she could marry with confidence.

Everything could have continued like this between *old Louis* and *young Elizabeth*, if the latter had not met a handsome man of her age, ready to marry her. Divine Providence had finally made her cross the steps of a new husband who earned a good living: handsome, herculean, kind, hardworking. In a word, he was the ideal man for a woman looking for protection and security, instead of waiting a long time for old Louis, for the marital security she greedily claimed, for herself and for her children born from her previous husband.

She accepted with enthusiasm and as a blessing, this new love that flattered her. She prepared to marry him. But as soon as she announced to her employer and lover that he had been too late and that she had finally "*found a shoe to her foot*", Louis Nato realized that, in the end, he could not live without her. He hastened to finally offer her marriage. Too late! It was a great jubilation for her and a relentless revenge to throw him a categorical *No!* in the face. He insisted. She replied that she did not want to hear from him anymore and that nothing would prevent her from marrying her new love, the great and beautiful Georges.

But Louis Nato filed a complaint against her and immediately opposed this union with Georges. He explained to the Court that she had been his *de facto fiancée* for years, that they lived in a *conjugal relationship*, that he had *taken care of her beautiful children like a real father* (which was true), that he had wanted to marry her for a

long time, and that she had *no moral right* to abandon him and offer herself to another man. All these reasons and broken promises, which today seem ridiculous and even absurd, were, at the end of the Second World War, considered binding, and any failure was punishable by the *Victorian moralizing law which proposed to force Canadians to Virtue*. The Government was like a Briard law-dog chaperoning its merinos virtue-sheeps.

Twice Nato officially opposed the impending marriage of Elizabeth and Georges. Nato's Letters of Opposition to the sheriff revealed an Elizabeth who was not at all inhibited by the prevailing morality standards of that time. She literally gave herself to the highest bidder for her material security. The young woman felt compelled to justify to her new husband and to the police *the reasons* for her decision to abandon her husband, *first*, then Nato and, *thirdly*, her deep desire to marry Georges. She even strove to distort the truth to appear less opportunistic and thus give herself a better conscience.

Elizabeth insisted at length on the thousand details of her life, on "*all the abuses she had had to suffer at the hands of her employer Nato, to keep her job*", to have the right to do his cleaning, his cooking, to wash his socks and underpants. She also claimed a great sense of self-denial by granting him—reluctantly, unwillingly, she angrily assure—the benevolence of her libido. She had granted him all these prodigalities that he tasted with delight, *only to keep her job*; only for that. Women are usually more flirtatious than men in the area of appearance, both physical, moral and psychological. She therefore forced the note on justification.

She was only a *poor victim*, a prey that the old man had gulped over for too many years in the most shameless fornication. Manipulated and outraged by his wife's declarations and accusations, the naïve Georges had sunk into a deep rage against this miserable old predator. Elizabeth managed to make him forget that she, too, was responsible for her own misfortunes. Her new husband's indignation had also instilled in her some desire for a complete revenge. No one had reminded her that the one who wishes to take revenge must prepare two graves: one for his enemy, and the other for himself. If the newlyweds nevertheless wanted to take revenge on Nato, it would be wiser to use the services of a Court of Justice, because "*Justice is the dressed up form of revenge, in its best*" as Stéphen Hecquet so elegantly and aptly wrote.



That, in her view, was the basis of this heartbreakin story. Now, barely one hundred and seventy-nine days later, locked up in her death cell row, Elizabeth heard a terrible detonation, it was her dear giant, her beloved husband, her protector, her love, the future of her children, who disappeared into the wooden trap of the sinister gallows. An oversized hatch to allow its giant to pass in a fraction of a second. And while she perceived the footsteps of the hangman who came to fetch her to make her suffer the same fate, no doubt she thought that she should not have charged her previous lover, Louis Nato, with all these superficial accusations in order to justify herself and whiten herself in the eyes of her new husband.



But let us return to the first missteps of this tragedy. On that hot night of Monday, 17th of June, 1946, when the two night visitors quickly took their seats in the back of Louis Nato's magnificent Silver-Arrow cabriolet. The car started without wasting time and plunged into the dangerous darkness of the night. An attentive observer might have guessed that Louis Nato seemed rather fearful and concerned about the adventure in which he was embarking, and that he followed this giant Popovitch against his will, like a frightened hostage.

In the sky, the moon's golden sickle was slowly harvesting stardust like a field of ripe wheat. Thirty minutes later, Charles Manning, an employee of the *Ontario Paper Mill*, saw Louis Nato driving his car passing by a street-light. But he was unable to recognize the couple he guessed, lurking in the back darkness, under the leather hood, like spiders watching their prey. Two hours later, around 3:30 a.m., as the day timidly pinkened the horizon, a wounded man, his face and head smeared with viscous blood, showed up at Madame Hélène Weiser's house. It was Louis Nato.

Hélène was surprised and even frightened to see this bloodied specter arrive in such a pitiful state. He walked with difficulty and wore only a curious motley outfit: underwear, sweater and shoes. According to the Criminal Record filed with the *National Archives of Justice in Ottawa*⁷, the assault on his person "was committed on a secondary road a short distance from Thorold Sud, between

⁷ •National Archives - (Archives of Justice) - File RG 13, vol. 1659, file CC 610, 1946-1947. Elizabeth Popovitch file.

midnight and two o'clock in the morning, on June 17th, 1946."

Louis Nato claimed that he had been severely beaten all over his body, including his head, during the night that was ending. He also added that he owned a *Bakery and a Confiserie* in the same Thorold-Sud, at 1160 central Niagara District, a region highly developed by the pulp industry, whose forests greened the beautiful landscapes of a thousand tones, from pale celadon to fiery sinople to indecisive emerald. All these majestic trees would end their lives in London tabloids to divulge some scandals quickly forgotten. And, hopefully, rolled into cones, these same newspapers would wrap fries or vegetables.

But the wounded and ragged old man remained evasive about the perpetrators, as well as about the precise reasons for his assault. What for? Having no telephone, Hélène Weiser could not call the fire brigade, the police, or even any taxi. To us who today have so many means of communication, such isolation may seem surprising, but the horrors of the Second World War had just ended, with, as the final bouquet of abomination, the liberation by the Russians of the Auschwitz extermination camp in Poland and the disclosure to the world of the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis.

Touched by the distress of the wounded man, Hélène wiped his blood-stained face, quenched his thirst with a large glass of water, and urged him to rest while waiting for the full sunrise in order to seek the help of the neighbors who had a telephone. But the wounded refused to linger. He seemed to fear imminent danger. Perhaps the

attackers would retrace their steps to finish him off? Maybe they had left him for dead? And, in this case, they risked coming to check whether the death of the victim had indeed erased any danger for themselves, *the murderers*.

Also, despite Helen's protests, the unknown man disappeared into the twilight landscape, like a ghost of the night, like a vampire fleeing the sun, like a bad dream that dislocates itself and fades at daybreak. Louis Nato soon appeared outside the door of John Tychynski, one of the Weiser's distant neighbors. He asked him if they had a phone. Yes! They had it. Louis then asked him to call a taxi.

In the meantime, John made him lie down and called for police-rescue. Sergeant Dennis Harold arrived within minutes, but Louis refused to reveal to him why he had been beaten to death [we can say "to death" since the man was going to die soon]. Harold felt that this was a problem that Nato wanted to solve alone; a vendetta, so to speak. If he had revealed the names of those who had beaten him, his revenge would be "signed", identified, clearly marked in the day it occurred. By keeping the secret, one could never find the origin of his reprisals that he would later inflict on the Popovitch couple.

Perhaps he simply feared that his enemies would complete the killing to suppress any witness? Anyway, the OPP [Ontario Provincial Police] police officer took the wounded man to Nick Bougay's house to give him first aid before sending him to the hospital. At dawn, the officer dropped him off at the Maplehurst Hospital Emergency Department. But the doctors soon found that the care did

not produce any improvement because the condition of the wounded Nato remained extremely serious. On the contrary, his hope of survival seemed to be deteriorating rapidly. He appeared to have reached the point of non-return. He was sliding inexorably towards a certain death, at very short-term.

Nato remained in intensive care for two days, before Dr. William McMillan decided to inform him that he was likely to die in the very near future, and that it was important and even essential that he reveals the final word on the case so that his attackers could be confronted with Justice. Convinced that he could never take revenge on his own, the dying man finally decided to talk about his ordeal in front of Dr. William McMillan and Florence Stevenson, nurse and owner of St. Catherine's Hospital in Thorold:

—I know who did this to me, doctor... he whispered one evening. It was Mrs. Elizabeth Johnson and her husband Georges Popovitch who inflicted all this on me... and at the same time, they stole my money... They popped up in my shop during the night, around 11:00 in the evening, and ordered me to drive them to an undetermined place... I took the money from the cash register and closed the store... We went to the old Davis Road. Suddenly, while driving, I received from behind a violent stiletto heel blow in the eye with a woman's shoe [high hill]. In the eye! Under this violent blow administered by Elizabeth Johnson, my eye began to bleed profusely. The blood blinded me, and as a result I could no longer see my way. I stopped the car on the side of the road. I then received a very violent blow to the head, which made me partially lose consciousness. My head fell on the steering wheel and I was

breathless. I felt the attacker lean from the back to remove the keychain from the ignition key and thus prevent me from restarting and escaping... They then got out of the car. Popovitch came to open my door and brutally tore me out of the car, threw me to the ground and hit my head with heels with unprecedented violence. After which, they took off my pants and searched my pockets, then they tore it apart... They took my wallet and the money in it. They counted and said, "There's only \$283.00! How come there's nothing more than that?"... So they beat me even more and searched my underwear, insulting me because they couldn't find anything. From there, I don't remember anything... until the car started again after re-boarding me... I begged them to stop beating me and take me home. They had my money, what else did they want? Exasperated by what I told them, both stopped the car again and beat me again, jumped on me, then violently hit my neck to the point that I lost consciousness... When I woke up, I was alone in the ditch where they had thrown me, presumably thinking I was dead, arms and legs tied to my neck. I managed to detach my hands and feet... after which I crawled and walked to a farm... I asked the farmer for water and to call the police⁸. Since the farmer didn't have a phone, I went to the neighbors' house. The police actually found his pants, all torn, a little further. He was asked why he had submitted to their demands? He remained stubbornly silent about it. He did not want to reveal anything else, but it seemed obvious to the hospital staff that he was forced under threat.

⁸ •National Archives - (Archives of Justice) - File RG 13, vol. 1659, file CC 610, 1946-1947. Elizabeth Popovitch.

As a direct result of this violent beating, Louis Nato actually fell into a deep coma and died at St. Catherine's Hospital on June 21st, four days after his admission there.



Unfortunately for the Popovitchs and fortunately for Justice, obsessed with the duty and the need to punish criminals, several witnesses had seen them together. The investigation showed that the man had indeed arrived at the farm around 3:30 a.m. in the morning of June 17th. His appearance was appalling, terribly damaged, without pants, and with a rope around his shoulders.

Inspector George Mackay of the OPP was given the task of coming to reinforce the local chief Harold and bring him his lights to clarify the whole matter. Mackay questioned Georges and Elizabeth Popovitch at length, whom he knew very well. A 45-year-old Polish-born and Serbian by adoption, Popovitch had lived in Welland for 15 years before moving to South Thorold in 1944. Georges Popovitch's personal description in the *Solicitation of Clemency*, which followed his death sentence, was as follows⁹:

—I lived in Welland for 15 years and worked without interruption in a single factory. I broke the record for never creating a problem in my environment. I was indeed a quiet, harmless and peaceful man. I am of Serbian extraction, a breed known for its emphasis on the fidelity of women to their promises of marriage. Can a man with such a description suddenly become a pimp [pimp] or a

⁹ •Ibidem.

thug [thug]?" The allusion to prostitution responded to the rumor that implied without clearly stating that Elizabeth had engaged in prostitution, to feed her dying husband and the children she had had from him.

Aged 38 and originally from Regina, the capital of the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, Elizabeth did indeed have a reputation as a frivolous¹⁰, light-minded woman, a lawless person, and a trafficker. The rumor, always fierce for women too beautiful, made her a *peripatetician* in her spare time, when the material need was felt. But on the other hand, all the gossips, who casually classified her in this withered category of "non-caste", agreed that she was an excellent mother to her three daughters. She had had these three children from a first marriage with a certain Antony Johnson who died in 1943, probably of a lung cancer.

Two years after Johnson's death, she married the accused Georges Popovitch in January 1945. This had not prevented her from maintaining a long and lasting relationship with the old Louis Nato whom she had desperately tried to marry. In vain! Faced with the apparent mistrust of the latter, she set her sights on this Serb from Yugoslavia whom she had finally managed to make herself loved. Despite this ambiguous affair and the fiddly breakup, the old Nato had kept a paternal relationship with the Johnson children: especially *Florence* (19) and *Helen Johnson* (13) whom he continued to take to school with his car every single school day.

¹⁰ •The original expression was "a whore". This is why Georges Popovitch was once accused of *pimping, proxenetism*.

Georges Popovitch, on the other hand, was a serious and loyal employee of the Ontario Paper Mills Pulp Company in Thorold South. He earned a very good salary and lived in the municipality of Louis Nato itself. He was a most peaceful giant. Tall and strong men, like large dogs, are more likely to exhibit peaceful and gentle characters. While the little ones, like roquets, have to constantly impose themselves and show their teeth to defend against external aggressions. They become angry and mean.

In those days, a man's salary allowed a family to live in affluence. Later, the financiers realized that they could lower men's wages since women also contributed their wages to the household. Taking advantage of this, the companies arranged for each of the two people in a couple to earn the equivalent of half a salary.

In 1942-1943-1944 and early 1945, before marrying Popovitch who augured a more serene and less uncertain future, Elizabeth had been an *all-purpose maid* at Louis Nato's house, because her sick husband could no longer work and contribute to the maintenance of the family.

Officially a handywoman servant, the role of the beautiful Elizabeth had not long been limited to this function of servitude. The judge had wondered why she had thus granted the old Nato particular indulgences. Probably to strengthen her grip on him at a time when her own husband was dying of this still incurable disease —cancer—. As a result, she would find herself facing a dark loneliness and existential insecurity. The old man had nothing to please her except his material ease, wealth, and their intimate interactions had only an economic purpose.

Her strategy had been entirely successful. Gently, imperceptibly, cuddle after hug, Nato had fallen in love with her. But he had carefully hidden it because he stubbornly refused to marry her, knowing by intimate conviction and life experience that this beautiful woman would become tyrannical as soon as the bond of marriage granted her absolute security and any legal power over him. She would become, by law, totally dependent on him and he would have to subsidize her life and whims, but he would not have the advantage or power of being the only one to share her intimacy.

Nato knew well that she had granted him all the carnal advantages for a very obvious purpose while her husband was still alive. He had no doubt that he avoided much hassle by keeping the *status quo*. Faced with the old man's marriage refusal, poor Elizabeth, who desperately wanted to ensure her future and the safety of her children without exhausting herself at work, continued to look for a wed-ding volunteer as she had done all her life. She met, around the same time, this other Slav named Georges Popovitch, very tall, very handsome, very generous... the ideal husband for a woman in great need of security and with no material resources as Elizabeth was.

A few months after her legal husband left the world of the living, one day in 1945, she prepared to marry her handsome blue-eyed Slav. She then decided to give up without regret her job with the old Nato whom she could now afford to hate openly, especially since he had ended up confessing his love for her. However, her daughters continued to live in Nato's house. We can assume this because he continued to drive them to school every morning.

Ironically, he even realized that he could not live without her. Knowing that she was proposing to marry Georges, Nato began to harass her into accepting his marriage proposal to her. Elizabeth refused with contempt, happy to be able to take revenge on the old man. Nato therefore twice opposed their union with Georges on the pretext that she had committed herself to him and that by breaking her Sacred Oath, she was desecrating and betraying all human rules.

On two occasions, the chief of police, Harold, had to deliver the same message of legal Opposition to her marriage to Georges, but Elizabeth refused to accept this challenge from her betrayed lover because she said:

—*Nato had treated me very badly!*

In fact, it was just a simple tactical maneuver, *an es-cape* designed to make her new husband believe that she had not used carnal seduction to take advantage of her boss, but rather that she had been his victim because he had forced her to bend to his whims. Was this old lustful man going to make her miss this unique opportunity for her and her children? Now she suddenly seemed to hate Nato. Was it not clear that Louis Nato's assaults of seduction towards her were nothing more than a "*Droit de Cuissage*", nothing more than the lust of a depraved boss on his employee? And she could not take the risk of resisting in the fearful obsession of losing her modest livelihood? Wasn't her hatred for this man quite understandable?

The arguments that Nato, the corrupt and licentious old libertine, was making in his *Letters of Opposition* to her marriage with Georges had infuriated her. They

pointed out that she had had the vileness to grant "*out of interest*" her plump body to the old man who was repugnant to her, for the sole purpose of tying herself up and enjoying his largesse while her husband was dying in suffering. No! She fiercely objected to her virtue being pilloried in this way.

She was indignant that this Georges Popovitch, this ideal man who brought Love to her on a silver platter, Security and Pride—everything she could wish for in a husband—could believe that she had behaved in such a perverse and amoral way. Hence his implacable hatred for her allowed himself to raise these abominations? Basically, she preferred to despise this odious merchant rather than herself! It was less destructive. That was exactly what a shrink today would have suggested to her. Wait a minute! The herculean strength of her handsome giant, Georges, left Elizabeth the power to plot, to cook a terrible revenge against this shabby old man; which she did, one day in June, when the muddy spring gave way to the flowery summer.



On the judicial level, the night attack of the Popovitch couple against Louis Nato, which ended in the death of the old man, represented a very damaging accusation that could lead them straight to the gallows, in the event that their participation in the crime was confirmed. Since Nato was no longer there to refute the obstinate denials of the Popovitchs, the Defendants absolutely had to invent an alibi that would absolve them of all blame. Fortunately for her, the cuning Elizabeth managed to produce almost

immediately this irrefutable alibi: "*around 2:00 in the morning, that is to say at the very moment when the aggression against this poor Nato was taking place, Elizabeth and Georges were precisely in Welland. Florence, Elizabeth's eldest daughter, swore that she had heard them arrive well before 2:00 a.m. and that they hadn't moved since that critical hour*" (critical for forging an indestructible alibi).

In addition, the Popovitchs owned their own car. Why on earth would they need Nato's car? This testimony from Florence was truly a dangerous *false testimony*. She ardently wanted to save her Mom, even though she felt great filial affection for Louis Nato and regretted with all her heart that he had paid with his life for this dispute; especially since, as already mentioned, he had continued to take care of the girls to the end, for example by paying the cost of their maintenance and driving them to school every day, like a good sugar daddy.

Everything could have turned to the advantage of Elizabeth and Georges thanks to Florence's imposture of complacency, if a grain of sand had not come to lodge in the well-oiled cogs of this untruth. It turned out that Louis Nato's beautiful Silver Arrow cabriolet was found a few hours later, abandoned and camouflaged in bushes not far from the road. And, unfortunately for the murderous couple, the police discovered on the floor of the right-back seat a button from a woman's coat that seemed to have been torn off under the effect of a violent effort. Some fibers of the coat were still attached to the button as if to authenticate its origin. This was a crucial clue and even a proof, if the coat could be found.

The reader will no doubt have remembered the button lined with green fabric of the coat of Florence-Filumena Lassandro which also cost her life, as well as her lover Emperor Pic. It was a very similar detail in the Popovitch case. Beware of buttons! By an incredible misfortune for the Popovitchs, Elizabeth's coat was also found at the home of the newlyweds Popovitch. Madame had hidden it under a pile of wool blankets. Verification done, it was missing a button! Elizabeth had realized the loss of the button but could not bring herself to throw in the garbage the coat she loved so much. Her sense of economy and her coquetry would cost her and her giant husband the rope.

A search of their home also discovered Nato's Rolex watch and his flashlight; a Swiss watch of great value that was the pride of its owner, and that everybody, the neighbors and friends, had of course noticed on the wrist of the *baker-confiseur*. A Rolex watch is not worn to tell the time but to express success. Confronted with the discovery of her button in the victim's car, Elizabeth immediately tried to "gamble" a convincing explanation. She stated that she had lent this coat to her own daughter Hélène, and it just so happened that Hélène had gone into Louis Nato's car shortly before this poor man was killed, when he had brought her to school.

John Suich, a taxi driver in Crowland, confirmed that Mr. and Mrs. Popovitch were with him until approximately... midnight on June 16th. Approximately? Yes, very approximately... in fact, cross-examined, he realized that he was *not absolutely sure*! Despite all these unbelievable explanations that sprang from the minds of the Popovitchs

like white rabbits off the hat of the magician Robert Houdin, the Popovitch couple was placed under arrest and imprisoned at the beginning of July 1946. The Court of Assizes trial was scheduled for the fall at the Welland Courthouse.



The Assizes actually opened on September 10th, 1946, in this city that had given its name to the Welland Canal built between 1824 and 1830 so that the navigation of the Great Lakes could bypass the part of the St. Lawrence River that was beaten by the American artillery. Judge William Schroeder presided. Mr. Hopp represented the people (or rather the king), as Prosecutor. Lawyer Musgrove held the Defense. True, Madame's daughter guaranteed the alibi of the two murderers, but the victim's testimony and the button of Elizabeth's coat found in Nato's car were decisive.

Everyone had the intimate conviction that Hélène was lying to save her dear Mom. Questioned without interruption until a total exhaustion by a subtle investigator, the girl finally admitted to having lied to save her mother. She had no idea what exact time her parents had returned that night. In addition, witnesses had seen the accused on the night of the crime. As noted above, Charles Manning, a truck driver who was carrying wood, had passed by the store around 1:20 a.m. on the night of the assault. He had seen the victim getting behind the wheel of his own cabriolet. A man and a woman were sitting in the back. The man was tall... very very big! As big as a Dutchman from

Friesland, this string of islands where men are giants, like Gulliver's Blefuscians!

The whole accusation was essentially based on the statements of the dying man who still had a very clear mind, statements collected by Dr. William H. McMillan and nurse Florence Stevenson. The wounded man had only agreed to speak when he understood that he would undoubtedly die in the very short term and that his revenge could no longer be perpetrated by his own hand. The vendetta was going to die on its own, for lack of avengers to feed it with their hatred!

The Crown presented several witnesses, including farmer Hélène Weiser. She claimed that the victim had a swollen head. One piece of rope hung from his left shoulder and another encircled his leg on the same side. For any garment, the old man wore only underpants that concealed his virility, or what was left of it. For lack of phones, she could not call a taxi or ambulance. So, Nato took time off to go to the home of a neighbor, John Tychynski, who was supposed to have a phone. He knocked on the latter's door at 3:30 a.m. Tychynsky described the victim in the same state as the farmer had done. He sent for the police. The Ontario Police investigator who came was Officer Harold. He also came to the bar to testify.

Although cornered to their limits by the avalanche of precise and repetitive questions from the police, the defendants confessed, detail after detail, only under the inexorable pressure of the evidence. They fought like lions to save their heads in a desperate defensive fight. Faced with the overwhelming evidence, the couple eventually

succumbed, at least admitting to having seen the victim on the night of June 16th to 17th. But their responsibility did not go beyond a few trivial details. Even more than Georges, Elizabeth defended herself tooth and nail by pointing out that Louis Nato had previously threatened her with a thousand revenges because she refused to marry him. These details were almost confessions! In fact, according to Mrs. Popovitch, the victim had simply and unjustly decided to "shift all the blame onto her in revenge for her indifference and coldness."

One of the witnesses, John Kuchoruk, a sawmill worker who knew the Popovitchs well, said that he was "*coming home from work at about 12:30 or 12:40 a.m. on June 17th when he met the Popovitchs on the street near Nato's shop.*" Kuchoruk even shouted to them a "*Hi Georges!*" in the serene calm of the starry night. Popovich replied, "*Hi John!*" This removed any likelihood of error or falsified alibi. The couple was walking west on the road from Niagara Falls in the direction of Louis Nato's shop.

Extreme bad luck for the Popovitch couple, Florence Elizabeth's eldest daughter, who had sworn that her mother, accompanied by Popovitch, had returned home around 3:00 a.m., finally confessed that she did not know what time they had returned because she had fallen asleep. She then tried to apologize for her lie by saying that she "*did not know why she had previously claimed that she went into the kitchen and saw her mother there.*" The contradiction had a very bad effect on the jurors in whose eyes a single lie seriously discredits the witness, as well as the Truth in general.

Subsequently, Hélène went to visit her incarcerated mother. As a result of this meeting, she claimed that she herself had lost the coat button in the back of Louis Nato's car, who, as stated several times, continued to drive the two children to school despite the bitter disagreement of the adults. This version of events had the immense advantage of taking into consideration the embarrassing button missing on Elizabeth's coat. Moreover, this new narrative seemed logical and truthful, even if the change of form cast doubt on the entire version, suggesting that the accused were desperately trying to adapt to the new circumstances.

By solving the riddle of the button, the course of events seemed truthful and acceptable. It could have saved their heads had it not been for an unfortunate witness: Charles Manning. Despite all that the attorneys could produce in the field of evidence —real or fictitious— they could not make the judges and jurors forget that this man had *seen with his own eyes "Louis Nato at night, at the wheel of his own cabriolet, with the two shadows of assassins lurking in the darkness of the rear."* This piece of the puzzle could not fit into any of the available scenarios despite the desperate efforts of the defendants and attorneys who vainly racked their brains to find an adequate lie that would fit exactly into the scenario like a puzzle piece, in order to cast a concealing veil over the Truth.

In the city, the anger of the population was getting worse, so much so that a friend of Nato, furious, attacked Popovitch with a baseball baton, during a transfer of the giant. On the second day of the trial, the two Defendants came to repeat that they were in Welland at the time of the

events. It felt that they were desperately clinging to this lie like mountain climbers in full fall to their broken ice axe. Confronted with the discovery of the victim's high-value Rolex watch and flashlight at their home, the defendants were still reluctant to confess to their crime because they knew that such misdeed could only be paid for by the rope.

All these pretenses could not prevent three days of trial from being more than enough to have them convicted by an all-male jury. In principle, the opinion of the jurors is elaborated and built solely on what is entirely provable and demonstrable: the theft of money from the cash register (\$283 at the time); the Rolex watch and flashlight found at the home of the Popovitch couple, the button torn off...

Faced with the indisputable evidence, Elizabeth's ultimate strategy was to explain, to justify her crime on the pretext of simply wanting to *silence* and *punish* Louis Nato, witness of her sad past. This final defense, therefore, was not taken into consideration because of the impossibility of proving anything. Especially since until the last day of his life, Nato continued to serve Elizabeth and her children by driving them to school or even to their extra-curricular activities, and by taking care of their food when they slept at his house on weekdays.



The trial thus ended, as it should have been, with the deliberations of the jurors. When they returned, the Registrar addressed the President:

—*Gentlemen of the Jury, have you reached an agreement on the verdict?*

—Yes! replied the President.

—Do you find the detainees at the bar of the Accused guilty or not guilty? the Registrar asked.

—Guilty!

—The two accused's? the Registrar asked.

—Yes!

—His Lordship, can I ask that the jurors be probed on each of the accused? asked Me. Musgrove, defense attorney.

—Yes! Make!

Asked about each of the two accused, all 12 jurors, answered unanimously:

—Guilty, Your Lordship!

Judge William Schroeder, who wanted to appease his own conscience and that of the jurors, who were generally very shaken by a persistent doubt at the idea of sending two people to an awful death with a simple "Yes!" without being absolutely certain of their guilt, then added:

—In my own opinion, the jury's verdict is fully justified by the evidence. There was undoubtedly a murder committed by these defendants, and it was a calculated murder, perpetrated in cold blood, with theft as the main motive, if not the only motive. The victim was cruelly beaten and marked by the blows: six fractured ribs, some piercing the lungs, several lacerations of the brain, lumbar piercing that

allowed to see the presence of blood in the spinal fluid. I will not recommend Clemency in these circumstances¹¹.

The theft of personal items (the Rolex watch and the flashlight) being the only fully provable motive, the guilt of the defendants had therefore been supported on this precarious basis. In 2016, assuming that capital punishment was still legal in Canada as it is across our southern border, never would a Court of Assizes¹² send a couple to their deaths on such thin and futile evidence.

—*Georges Popovitch and Elizabeth Popovitch, please stand up!* Judge Schroeder then ordered.

As soon as the defendants were up:

—*Georges Popovitch, do you have anything to add so that the sentence is not pronounced against you according to the law?*

¹¹ •National Archives - (Archives of Justice) - File RG 13, vol. 1659, file CC 610, 1946-1947. Elizabeth Popovitch file.

¹² •The word *sitting (assizes)* alludes to the fact that the judge and jurors sit in a given place, for the purpose of deliberating and judging a person for a crime. The Itinerant Courts of Justice in France (and England where, through the French of William the Conqueror, such courts were established) could go and sit in rural areas. With regard to the Assize Courts imported into England by the French of William the Conqueror, one of the elements that sustained the English resistance against the French was the violence and contempt to which the English were subjected by the French colonizers. A law of William dated 1087 specified in old french of Normandy: "Ki freceis occist, and the homes del hundred nel prengent and bring to Justice..." "When a French is killed or found dead in any county of England, the inhabitants of the township shall seize and surrender the murderer within eight days, otherwise..." It was necessary for the canton to prove before an Assize Court that would come to sit there, that the corpse was not that of a French, so as not to have to pay a heavy fine and sometimes bloody reprisals. Nearly three centuries later, this investigation was still being done in places, according to some. It was the 'Demonstration of Englishness or Démonstration d'Anglaiserie.' Thomas de Littleton (1407–1481), Treatise on Tenures. - In the nineteenth century, this notion of collective responsibility was applied throughout the British Empire in so-called ethnic circles in order to protect English settlers.

—Yes,... *I now have two more witnesses,*" replied the giant.

—*Is that all you have to say?* the judge asked.

—Yes!

—*Elizabeth Popovitch, do you have anything to add so that the sentence is not pronounced against you according to the law?*

—*All I can say is that I am not guilty of this accusation, and neither is my husband guilty! That's all I have to say!"* replied Elizabeth.

—*I must tell you, justice Schroeder unperturbedly continued, that you were both found guilty, after a trial which, I am required to say, was a just trial, by a jury of 12 just men, sworn in to perform their duty under the Law. They are twelve righteous and conscientious men. I won't tell you anything more at this solemn and terrible time because anything I could say would only increase the anguish of your soul. The judgment of this Court is that you will be led from here to the place from which you came, and there you will be kept in confinement until Tuesday, the eighteenth day of November 1946; from there you will be brought to the place of your execution, and from there you will be hanged by the neck until death ensues. May God have mercy on your soul. Guards!... Take the prisoners away!* concludes the judge in a monochord voice, before the morally collapsed convicts. They did not benefit from any Recommendation from Clemence.



The Popovitch File was immediately reworked by Me. Musgrove, the Defense attorney, to present it with some chance of success to the judges of the Ontario Court of Appeal, in order to obtain the *extenuating circumstances* that would have saved their lives.

The "confessions" were therefore of a very different flavor. They boiled down to the following lies: "*Georges arrived that night at Nato's house where he found his wife in the arms of Louis Nato. Furious, he beat the seducer with violent blows. Then, with the help of his contrite wife, he took the victim far away, to abandon him and thus give him a good lesson. But in no way did they expect Louis Nato to die as a result of this correction.*"

The imaginative lawyer turned it into a simple matter of morals that had gone wrong with an assault and battery that was too strong. If the Appeal Judges took it into account, the wife would be exempt from all blame (or almost.)¹³ As for the husband, he could benefit from the *mitigating circumstances*, jealousy in love having disturbed his judgment. This type of escape defense did not really exist in Canada as in France, a half-Latin country that systematically placed the *Honour of a Man* in the female hypogastrum. But the principle would still influence the judges who were all men and who would not fail to wonder what they would have done themselves if they had been viciously flouted and cruelly cuckolded by their own wife in the grip of the famous midlife crisis.

¹³ •She had only deceived her husband and could thus suffer some insults that the reader can easily imagine, at worst a few years in prison to instill Fidelity in her. In any case, no one would think of imposing the terrible death penalty on her.

Unfortunately, the Defendants' previous confessions and previous lies persuaded the Court of Appeal to refuse outright to reopen this case in an attempt to save their lives. The Appeal was therefore dismissed, and a new execution date set for December 5th 1946. Due to a final Appeal to the then Minister of Justice (the Honourable Louis Saint-Laurent), the Sheriff of Welland County delayed the construction of the scaffold until the last moment so as not to waste taxpayer's money unnecessarily.

The day before the execution, any extension becoming impossible, since the minister Louis Saint-Laurent had gone to New York for an international conference preliminary to the creation of the United Nations Organization which was born eight years later in replacement of the defunct and ineffective SDN (Société des Nations or League of Nations), the local carpenters began to build the scaffold with great hammer blows to support the Woods of Justice which seem in this case to represent the Woods of Unjustice.

THE OTTAWA JOURNAL of December 3rd, 1946, stated: "This afternoon, the terrible sound of the hammer was heard from the corridors of the Welland County Courthouse, indicating that the scaffold was being erected for the execution, this Thursday, of Mr. and Madame Popovitch. They were sentenced to die for the murder of Louis Nato, a Thorold Sud merchant, last June. The executioner arrived in Welland this afternoon and unless there is a last-minute pardon, he will officiate at this execution of the first Ontario couple in 84 years... Mr. Pierre Thibault, Registrar of Graces of the Secretary of State, stated that he had not yet received any notification regarding the Cabinet

decision in this specific case." The couple's last request to spend a few final hours together was unduly rejected by the prison authorities.

At midnight forty-five minutes, the precise time scheduled for the death of George Popovich, the giant plunged noisily into the trap and his heart stopped beating in ten short minutes.

Sitting in the cell of the death row inmates, the beautiful Elizabeth heard this huge and cruel noise. Her hero, her giant, her invulnerable protector was dying through her fault. She felt her heart and mind capsized in horror. And then she heard that the executioner and Death were approaching her door to come and get her...

At 12:55 a.m., as soon as the doctor had checked that her husband's heart was no longer beating, Elizabeth Popovitch came out of her cell for her last walk. At 1:00 a.m., she also plunged into the Hereafter, shouting through her death hood: "*God bless you, all!*" This was her last message before her encounter with God, whom she evoked with her disconcerting cry. Did she really think these good words... or the opposite? Elizabeth's remains were taken away by her family and secretly buried somewhere in the Province of Ontario or perhaps of Saskatchewan.

The death of the couple went unnoticed with the exception of few threads in the Ontario newspapers. Indeed, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, stunned Europe discovered at the same time, the horror of the Nazi extermination camps, hitherto simply subodorous, in

which millions of Slavs, Jews and Gypsies disappeared... among others¹⁴.



¹⁴ •Ten million Russian soldiers killed in combat or starved to death in POW camps, not to mention 16,000,000 Russian Slavic civilians out of a population of 140,000,000 (18.5% of the total population); 6,000,000 Jews out of an estimated total of 15,000,000 (40% of the total population) and for gypsies, between 220,000 and 300,000 out of 1,000,000 (a percentage between 22 and 30% of the total).

Crimes and Punishments of Canadian Women.

The Sault-au-Cochon Terrorist Crime

The Marguerite Pitre Murder Crime, 1953

The morning of September 9th, 1949, was well advanced. All the radio stations in Quebec¹ commented endlessly on the creation of a new country, Federal Republic of Germany, on the smoking ashes of the horrible Nazi Empire that had just exhaled its last breath of hatred in the ruins of most of the countries of Europe.

All the capitals had been destroyed by the war, except Paris thanks to the refusal of Hitler's orders by the German Governor Dietrich von Choltitz². The world had just discovered the horror of the extermination camps that had proliferated through this Evil Empire like the pustules of a scaly leprosy. These horrors had discredited Europe in the eyes of other continents that were almost entirely colonized. All the peoples of these empires would quickly drive from their homes those pretentious Europeans who until then were convinced that their civilization was superior to others...

¹ •Television did not begin until 1952.

² •Who had taken care to shelter his family to avoid Hitler's revenge.

Suddenly, around 10:50 a.m., all the radio stations abruptly suspended their broadcasts to announce a staggering news:

—We interrupt our program, to let you know that a Canadian Pacific Airways³ DC-3 plane from Montreal to Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles, has just exploded in flight and crashed over the locality Le-Sault-au-Cochon⁴. Relief workers are pouring in to the scene of the disaster. There would be 22 passengers on board and a crew of four. Stay tuned to our antenna; we will keep you informed.

Throughout Québec, this news reverberated from radio antenna to radio antennas and spread like wildfire, including in the distant mining regions of Abitibi-Témiscamingue where curious bilingual radio stations proclaimed the news in both official languages alternately. Even though most of the population was Francophone, the few bosses of the mining companies were generally Anglophones and imposed on the people assimilative bilingualism.

The world is now accustomed to all these air accidents, so much so that only the most important ones are announced at the international level. This Sault-au-Cochon catastrophe was going to be considered the first terrorist crime of this kind. Many others will follow this

³ •Twenty years later, the national airline Canadian Pacific Airlines became Air Canada, under pressure from Quebecers.

⁴ •The name Sault-au-Cochon takes its origin from the presence in the river sector of porpoises (belugas) formerly called sea-pigs or *cochons-de-mer*. [Commission de toponymie du Québec] An Islamic association in Quebec recently tried to change the name, out of hatred of this animal curiously considered impure by the Semitic people (Muslims and Jews) for ancient reasons that are lost in prehistory.

one because sometimes some criminals choose a pseudo ideal (religious or political) to be able to indulge in their vice: to kill, to kill their fellow human beings, because they feel powerful by taking life as God does. Today crimes of this type are usually provoked by Islamic fundamentalism, but in 1949 there were few terrorists in Christian countries: Ireland and the Spanish Basque Country. Bombs were not yet placed in civilian planes to blow them up. This 1949 attack killed 23 innocent people. It can be linked to the 1985 Air India⁵ attack that brought so many tears to the citizens of India and so much useless money from Canadian taxpayers, without the mastermind of the crime eventually being punished.



On the afternoon of September 9th, 1949, a *Canadian Pacific Airways* DC-3 coming from Montréal-Dorval took off from its Québec port of call L'Ancienne-Lorette⁶, bound for Baie-Comeau and then Sept-Îles. The company served this line thrice a week. About fifteen minutes after takeoff, the passengers were admiring through the port-holes the grandiose landscapes, while sucking on a candy⁷ that the stewardess had just distributed. Suddenly, the plane exploded and fell back in rain on *Cap Tourmente*, along the north shore of the vast St. Lawrence Estuary.

⁵ •Air India Flight 182. From Montreal to London. All 329 passengers died, victims of Canadian Sikh terrorism. The murderer Inderjit Singh Reyat was sentenced to prison. On the other hand, the mastermind of the plot manages to get by without difficulty. The Justice of the Rich is less wicked than that of the Poor.

⁶ •Today *Aéroport International de Québec-Jean-Lesage*.

⁷ •Sweet tamarind candies trigger salivation, thereby causing frequent swallowing, which helps equalize air pressure levels between the outside ear and the middle ear cavity to prevent retraction.

Twenty-three people perished for reasons that were initially mysterious.

A witness recounted the disaster in the daily newspaper *LE SOLEIL DE QUÉBEC*: "I was working on the railway with four of my companions [railway workers], when we heard an explosion. I cast my eyes at the sky and saw a plane making a curve and heading towards the hills north of the railway. The airplane struck a large cape that rises near the bank of the river, beyond the railway, to the north. I caught the attention of my companions. We were sure that the plane had just fallen nearby, and we sank into the bush where we saw the debris. I witnessed the worst scene I have ever seen. There were 22 corpses on the plane: all died instantly. Arms, legs, heads separated from the bodies littered the ground. We saw the shredded corpses of small children. The front part of the plane seemed intact to us. The lint and pulp corpses piled up in it, as if all had been thrown forward at the moment the plane crashed. The fragments of the aircraft were scattered throughout the surroundings. There was nothing we could do and came out of the woods to alert the railway authorities. As long as I live, I will never forget the scene that was offered to us⁸⁸."

⁸⁸ •List of victims: 1-Mrs. J.-A. Guay, 2-Mrs. R. Chapadeau, 37 years old, of Baie-Comeau and her three children; 3- M^{le} France Chapadeau, 14 years old; 4-C. Chapadeau, 13 years old; 5-G. Chapadeau, 11 months. 6-Mr. Henri-Paul Bouchard, of Baie-Comeau, 7-Mrs. Henri-Paul Bouchard, his wife; 8-and their baby, 9-M. L. Dallaire, 24 years old, garage owner of Chutes-aux-Outardes, 10-Mme R. Durette, of Baie-Trinité, 11-Mme Béatrice Firlotte, of Broadlands, 12-M. H. Pye, of Sherbrooke, 13-C. Humphries and 14-A. R. Keller, both of Montreal and inspectors of the Bank of Montreal, 15-E. J. Calnan and 16-William Shoulder, both of St. Catarines, Ontario, and employees of Ontario Paper. 17-E. T. Stannard, of New York, President of Kennecott Copper Co., 18-R. J. Parker, of New York, Vice-President of Kennecott Co. and President of Québec Iron and Titanium Co., 19-Arthur D. Storke, of New York, former President of Climax Molybdenum Co. and designated successor of Mr. Stannard as



By incredible luck, the plane had not caught fire, leaving investigators the opportunity to observe every revealing detail. Inspector René Bélac of the RCMP Federal Police led the search with Corporal Gérald Houle. The team was therefore composed of police officers from the *Sûreté du Québec* as well as Gendarmes from the *Mounted Police*⁹. First of all, it was believed to be a pure accident. Then, the investigators found that the explosion had occurred in the left baggage compartment. This part of the plane had been loaded at the Québec City stopover.

From the beginning, however, the progress and serenity of the investigation were disrupted by the presence of American industrialists among the victims: President E. Stannard and Vice President R. Parker of the Kennecott Copper Co., as well as the President of Stannard & Co. Arthur Storke. Two Ontario pulp engineers, E. Calnan and W. Scouliari, also took part in this "Great Journey", as well as several French-Canadian. In Québec City had embarked two residents of the Old Capital, Mrs. Rita Guay, as well as Mrs. Roméo Chapados with her three children.

The fact that American industrialists —this new aristocracy of the world plutocracy— were present, made the investigation naturally turn to an economic crime. We

President of Kennecott Co. The four crew members: 20-Captain Pierre Laurin, of Montreal, 21- First Officer Gordon Alexander, of Montreal, co-pilot. 22-Mechanic Émile Therrien, of Montreal, 23- hostess, Gertrude McKay, of Edmonton.

⁹ •The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (colloquially known as mounted police in memory of the days when constables travelled on horseback) is federal, but the federal government hires its services to some provinces that do not want to maintain a provincial police force.

know that the industrial and commercial companies whose god is Hermes (the god of thieves and merchants), not only engage in total espionage but also in a ruthless war for small greenbacks. In the Middle Ages, the Great Companies of Brigands scoured Europe; today they are plundering the world.

There is no doubt that, without the vigilance of the Quebec police authorities, Canadian Justice, followed by Maurice Duplessis' politicians, could easily have fallen into a miscarriage of Justice and the execution of an innocent man. This same problem had happened with Wilbert Coffin during the year 1953, the precise year that Marguerite Pitre will be hanged¹⁰.

In Quebec, a journalist named Edmond Chassé, a high-class snooper despite his venerable age, launched his own investigation to nibble away at the darkness and unravel the enigma. Thanks to his keen intelligence and the goddess Chance whom he knew how to court and tame, he greatly participated in exhuming the truth and light of this obscure mystery.

He immediately went to the Québec Airport and learned that a "*mysterious and very nervous woman*", dressed in *black*, had herself gone to the terminal by taxi on the day of the crime, in order to send a suspicious package by the same Douglas DC3... just at the time of departure. Then, to the surprise of the investigators, this "accident" quickly turned into a "criminal attack" in everyone's

¹⁰ •The murder of three American hunters in Gaspésie occurred in 1953, but the execution of Québécois Wilbert Coffin took place in 1956 at the Bordeaux prison in Montréal.

mind. In less than two days of investigation, it became clear that a bomb had caused the disaster.

What seems obvious today was not the case in 1949. The world did not believe that a man could be demonic enough to dynamite a plane loaded with women and children. The police sifted through all the luggage. It soon became apparent that one of the packages, a 13^{kg} item, wrapped in paper, had been shipped to a fictitious address in Baie-Comeau. The sender did not exist either, at least under the declared name.

On September 12th, the *Investigative Committee* officially declared that a bomb hidden in the baggage hold had caused the death of all. The Press told the general public about it, and Edmond Chassé's discoveries concerning the "*mysterious and nervous woman who had delivered the parcel to the airport of L'Ancienne-Lorette*", threw consternation and panic in the small group of conspirators who had carried out the killing.

The mastermind of this atrocious crime was a certain citizen of Québec City named Joseph-Albert Guay. It was he himself who had orchestrated the manufacture and shipment of the bomb. "*Until then*, wrote the same journalist when the plotters were known by the public and he was able to openly investigate them, "*they seemed to be on the right side of the fence, in Guay's entourage, the side of the victims. Wasn't Joseph-Albert the grieving husband who, on the scene of the disaster, had whispered with great sadness in his eyes, if not tears: "My poor wife!" Wasn't he the father of a six-year-old orphan, Lise, who deserved*

*everyone's sympathy?*¹¹" Ah! He must have believed then that his crime would go unpunished until the end of times!

Later, the bomb dispatcher, Marguerite Pitre, "*the Pitre woman*" panicked¹². Guay bluntly ordered those who had carried out his orders to commit suicide in order to escape all sophisticated police interrogations, which would not fail to make them spill the truth, when they were identified. And it wasn't just a suggestion; it was *a positive and clear order*. He even provided them with the doses of sleeping pill necessary to fall asleep for Eternity in order to erase themselves from the list of suspects who risked incriminating him, "*he, the mastermind of the crime.*

Marguerite's brother, Généreux Ruest, also received the same self-destruction ultimatum and the same boxes of sleeping pills. The assassin wanted to suppress all Prosecution witnesses, without exception... except himself. Finally, this forced suicide demanded by Joseph-Albert boomeranged, because the fuse of this conspiracy was definitively exposed the day Marguerite Pitre-Ruest had to be driven to the hospital for taking an almost fatal dose of sleeping pills. Almost...



Joseph-Albert Guay, Marguerite Pitre (née Ruest) and her brother Généreux Ruest, were three residents of the Old Capital city of the province. Joseph-Albert (32 years old) was the proud owner of a jewellery store and a

¹¹ •Excerpt from the newspaper LE SOLEIL DE QUÉBEC of January 12th, 1951.

¹² •*La femme Pitre*, as the contemptuous journalists soon called her. It means The female clown, The clown woman.

clockshop of which Généreux Ruest was the skillful watchmaker.

As for Marguerite Pitre, sister of Généreux, she knew well her brother's boss, Mr. Joseph-Albert Guay. She lent him her apartment as a love-nest so that he could give his young mistress Marie-Ange Robitaille (16 years old) the attentions he no longer felt the desire to give to his wife Rita.

Joseph-Albert had met Marie-Ange through Marguerite Pitre. The two women worked as waitresses at the now defunct *Miranda Restaurant*. Although handicapped in the lower limbs and forced to move around in a wheelchair, Généreux Ruest ranked among the best clockmakers in the world for his ingenuity in the noble techniques of watchmaking. He was a virtuoso of his fingers and literally great at inventing and pairing with radios, watchmaking mechanisms of very high level. Some disabled with a steel core, sublimate their handicap by developing remarkable superiorities in other related techniques.

The last involuntary actress of this atrocious drama was the victim herself, Rita Morel, wife of the "*instigator of the crime*", Joseph-Albert Guay. As can be judged by the photo presented in these pages, Rita had been, a few years earlier, one of the most beautiful women in the grandiose city of Québec, but time had somewhat blunted her beauty and coated her flesh with some ungrateful cellulite, to the point that, henceforth, the inconsistent Joseph-Albert had eyes only for his young mermaid Marie-Ange, a teenager who hypnotized him with her irresistible charm.

It was for his greatest misfortune! He should have thought that mermaid stories inevitably end in fishtails.

Faced with these frightened actors who hid among the population of *Québec City* like a needle in a haystack, the paparazzi Edmond Chassé would discover, clue after clue, the ins and outs of the conspiracy. Knowing that the bomb had been loaded at Quebec, he went to the Baggage Department at Ancienne-Lorette Airport¹³ to question the baggage handlers. He learned from the parcel attendant, Denis Lafleur, that a mysterious woman, dressed in black, small, corpulent, forty-year-old, brown eyes and black hair, who behaved very nervously, had emerged from a taxi that morning, five minutes before the departure time of the airliner, in order to ship a package.

Chassé's finding was already a step in the right direction, except that such a description could correspond to 25,000 women in each of Canada's major cities. Another baggage handler, Willie Lamonde, was able to describe the package that was left in front of him, on his counter. The package was heavy, misshapen and wrapped in paper. As for the corpulent woman, nervous and in a black dress:

—She had not wanted to carry the package herself! It was the taxi driver who was instructed by the lady to transport the package to the shipping counter.

¹³ •This Québec City airport is now called Jean Lesage International Airport, named after a politician who was one of the actors of the *Quiet Revolution*. This Revolution was a rapid evolution, the adolescent crisis of a people who transformed Québec into a modern state and intransigent in terms of its cultural rights.

The stranger would have liked to be noticed that she would not have acted differently, by her perpetuals:

—*Attention !... Gently!... Môdit !... It's fragile!... Careful!...*

The slip listing the cargo inventory revealed that the gift package came from a fictitious sender, a certain Delphine Bouchard. It was addressed to Alfred Plouffe, a rather cynical *diving onomatopoeia*, given the circumstances. The journalist immediately thought that the package probably contained the bomb that had caused the fatal accident, because neither of these characters existed. No doubt about that!

The police soon found the taxi driver. Unfortunately, it was impossible for him to remember the place where he had taken his client. The track became momentarily foggy. As for the journalists, they nicknamed the mysterious woman in black: **The Raven**, simply for the color of her dress. They forgot that "women's clothing often reflects their psychological state"¹⁴.

The investigation then turned to the passengers of the plane and the life insurances that motivated and still give rise to so many crimes today, that they should, therefore, be called "*assassination insurance*." The gendarmes soon discovered that no one had high-value life insurance, at least acquired in recent months, or personal property that could motivate a killer to commit a crime. Only the jeweler of Quebec, Joseph-Albert Guay was the happy beneficiary

¹⁴ •As Dr. Valérie C. rightly pointed out.

of a huge sum of \$10,000 of life insurance thanks to the death of his wife Rita who was on the plane.

In addition, Joseph-Albert had himself taken out this insurance —in the name of his wife and for his own benefit— only a few minutes before boarding. The researcher frowned more and more. In the investigation specific to each victim (civil status, profession, contact details, family, criminal record, life insurance ...), the police raked wide in order to shed light on the overall situation of each. They finally came to this famous jeweler Joseph-Albert Guay, the mournful husband of the victim Rita Morel; the same one who, between two tearsless sobs, as dry as the Sahara, had whispered as he looked at the tangled bodies around the wreckage of the plane:

—*My poor wife!*

A detail that could prove to be very interesting, quickly emerged from his criminal record. Three months earlier, in June, this same Joseph-Albert had been sentenced to a consistent fine for having, with a revolver, threatened his mistress, a young 15-year-old waitress, at the Miranda restaurant in Quebec City. Today, the man would be incarcerated for pedophilia. But at the time, the judges saw the offence as nothing more than a threat from a firearm. The term pedophilia did not yet exist and a Hellenist would have seen in this neologism only a honest and commendable love for children.

The gendarmes immediately went to question this teenager named Marie-Ange Robitaille. They right away noticed that the girl was of a spellbinding charm; a beauty

that would have condemned her to be sacrificed to the Mayan God of Rain, Chāāc, if she had had the misfortune of once being born in the Yucatan. But thanks God, she was born in the *Belle Province*.

Although she ran no risk of being thrown into the great Sacred Well of Chichén Itzá after being ritually raped by a Mayan warrior, she had nevertheless put herself in an inextricable mess by falling in love with a demented assassin; or perhaps she was only in love with the multitude of gifts that her old lover Joseph-Albert Guay filled her with, literally overwhelmed her.

Ingenuously, the beautiful Marie-Ange admitted without any hesitation the quarrel with her old lover, but she confessed that everything was now arranged. In verve that day, she even added that, "*one day, Joseph-Albert's wife had noticed this extramarital affair with her husband.*" So Marie-Ange had wanted to break up. She felt as guilty as an impure sinful, to desecrate *God's 7th and 10th Commandments*. She saw herself covered in opprobrium, especially because her moral misconduct had become public, like *Eve* who, once, has just realized that she was naked and who strived to hide her nudity behind a large maple leaf.

Marie-Ange Robitaille had wanted to immediately interrupt this scandal, this ambiguous situation that wilted her and doomed her to Eternal Hell. She understood that Joseph-Albert was desperately looking for a cause of annulment or separation in order to permanently break the marital bond with his wife. The State did not allow divorce to her lover without very serious reasons, but the Church

granted "annulment" without compelling cause (high consanguinity, refusal to consume, forced marriage ...). She knew that the last cause, very abstract, could be invented, improvised, forged by a sleight of hand, like a cheater who pulls the right card from his sleeve. It was still necessary for both spouses to agree on this point.



Marie-Ange Robitaille, l'adolescente de 16ans. Priv.Coll

What Marie-Ange did not know was that Joseph-Albert categorically refused to *share* the family patrimony and the acquired assets he claimed to have accumulated by his intelligence alone. The usual pretext for lawless spouses. The attentive reader has no doubt noticed that most of the criminals listed in this book have tried to keep all the household property to themselves. To solve this problem for

their own benefit, Joseph-Albert also intensely sought a way to eliminate his wife. In the meantime, he begged his young mistress to keep patience. He would soon marry her,... very soon! *I swear to God!*

—*Yes!* replied Marie-Ange. *For months I was the jeweler's blonde. He will have his marriage annulled. I want to be his wife.*

Joseph-Albert implored her each and every day to wait. Invoking all the Saints of Christianity, he swore that he would marry her, as soon as possible!

A few days later, his wife took the plane, and, by an extraordinary and quite jubilant coincidence for their idyll of Love... the plane crashed. It was sad for her, but everyone knows that the misfortune of some almost always makes the happiness of others! What a chance for their Love so promising! Full of curiosity, the investigators asked her if, "*by an extraordinary and salutary coincidence*", she would not know a "*very round, plump*" woman, who usually evolved in the orbit of her lover, Joseph-Albert Guay.

This question would be much more embarrassing today because being overweight impairs the health and figure of almost half of the population. But at the time, sugary drinks and deleterious foods had not yet had time to plague public health for the sole benefit of a handful of perverse billionaires. In spontaneous response to this question, Marie-Ange immediately proposed the name of a certain "*Marguerite Pitre who worked with me as a waitress at the Miranda Restaurant.*" Certainly, she was classified as "*very round*" for the middle of this twentieth century. But she would now be considered "*plump or fleshy*" in our society where obesity is rampant, endemic. Marie-Ange revealed to them that this woman was then living at street number 49, on Rue Gauvreau in Québec City¹⁵.

Delighted with this precious confidence, the investigators took the taxi driver to Marguerite Pitre's address and then to the Hôpital-Général where she had just been hospitalized for a suicide attempt. The taxi driver immediately recognized Marguerite Pitre, née Ruest, the one whom the

¹⁵ •A street that no longer exists, nor does the restaurant mentioned.

newspapers nicknamed *Le Corbeau*. But this time she was dressed in white, the color of the hospital's cache-mise-sère¹⁶:

—Yes! Yes! Without a doubt, she is the one who made me carry the bomb to the airport of L'Ancienne-Lorette!



Joseph-Albert Guay. The master-mind. Priv. Coll.

Marguerite Pitre explained to the investigators that she had just attempted suicide on September 19th, 1949. And she revealed the reasons: the report of the journalist Edmond Chassé on "*the nervous woman who had delivered the package*", had totally thrown panic and disarray within the small group of conspirators who gravitated around Joseph-Albert. Because this killer

had just then revealed to them that the famous package was a time-bomb intended to destroy the airliner.

Indeed, while listening to this radio report, Joseph-Albert Guay had been terrified at the idea that Justice, which was inexorably approaching, could end up falling on his head for having plotted the crime. Moreover, he had

¹⁶ •These cover-up pajamas-dresses are blue today, pale blue.

been frightened to think that the two witnesses to the crime, Généreux Ruest and his sister Marguerite Ruest (M^{me} Pitre), could confess that he had asked them to make the bomb and then send it by plane. Faced with this imminent danger, Joseph-Albert Guay did not beat around the bush. He got straight to the point. He literally ordered Marguerite and Généreux to commit suicide after writing a farewell letter to affirm that it was an authentic suicide and not an assassination in disguise.

Like the pharaohs of ancient Egypt who, in order to keep the secrets of the pyramids, condemned the architect and the workers to perish walled in stone, he wanted to



Généreux Ruest. Priv. Coll.

make his two *innocent* helpers disappear. They were really innocent because Généreux and Marguerite thought that the bomb was intended to destroy a rock (a boulder) that was cluttering up the land of Joseph-Albert Guay's cottage in Rivière-aux-Pins close to Baie-Comeau. To insist on the need to commit suicide, Joseph-Albert had even provided them with the necessary pills! What a staggering generosity!

More influenceable, Marguerite Pitre had ingested the huge dose of sleeping pills and had been hospitalized in critical condition. But suicide was considered a crime

by the Criminal Code of Quebec strongly influenced by Catholic Canon Law¹⁷. It was therefore dangerous to miss his suicide. And, when the police questioned Marguerite Pitre about the reasons for her eagerness to leave this world in which she did not seem so unhappy, she announced that she was totally desperate because Joseph-Albert Guay had just revealed to her that the "fragile" package he had instructed her to send by plane, on September 9th, was indeed a statue of the Virgin Mary, but that statue, originally hollow, had been stuffed with dynamite. It was the **time bomb** that had been at the origin of the aerial massacre.



Rita Guay. Priv.Coll

Marguerite herself had bought the dynamite sticks to make this bomb. *Joseph-Albert had explained to her, she recounted, that he wanted to get rid of a huge rock that cluttered the grounds of his holiday cottage in Rivière-aux-Pins, and that there was only the solution of blowing it up because it was*

¹⁷ •In New-France times, suicide was considered one of the great crimes. The corpse of a person convicted of suicide (or even attempted suicide) was hanged by the feet in the public square and then thrown into the road. Suicide was only removed from the Canadian Criminal Code in... 1972.

strictly inseparable from the rocky ground.

The same suicide order had been given to Marguerite's brother, Généreux Ruest, the designer of this time bomb that made it possible to "walk away as far as possible from the explosion so as not to suffer the fallout". Marguerite insisted that she had only sent the package to serve Joseph-Albert. Moreover, she always maintained that Guay, in handing her the package, had told her that it contained an extremely fragile statue of the Virgin Mary.

Despite her plausible explanations, Marguerite Pitre-Ruest was unceremoniously taken on board by the police, who cared very little about her vacillating health and botched convalescence. While her guilt in the attack was not proven, she had at least violated the law that criminalized suicide. And since she had had the bad fortune not to fall asleep for eternity under the effect of the medicated poison, Dame Justice risked helping her to succeed in her self-destructive gesture. This was indeed what happened!

Questioned during the investigation by Me. Dorion, after she had finally managed to wrest her weak personality from the psychological clutches of Joseph-Albert, Marguerite Pitre agreed to admit that she had been purely and simply manipulated by the owner of the jewelry store. The gallows perspective encourages reflection, despite what some obsessive and neurotic abolitionists claim. Joseph-Albert, who was clearly the mastermind of the crime, was immediately arrested and imprisoned. He cried out, vehemently proclaimed his innocence, and even claimed, believing he was clearing himself of any suspicion, "that

there was nothing more monstrous than to blow up a plane¹⁸."

In terms of monstrosity, the rest of this story demonstrated that Joseph-Albert would raise the level of perversity and scoundrels to a height never before reached by a human being. A very thorough search then began on Joseph-Albert Guay. He was 32 years old at the time of the crime. He had married Rita Morel during the Second



Joseph Albert Guay condamné à mort. Priv.Coll.

World War while they were both working in a munitions factory that supplied various shells to Canadian artillery. After work, Guay sold jewelry to add a little butter in the spinach of his menus.

¹⁸ •He recalls in this the pedophile killer Patrick Henry who murdered an eight-year-old child (Philippe Bertrand) and who declared on television "that he was innocent and that the real murderer deserved the death penalty for having attacked a child." Despite this he was found guilty. Lawyer Robert Badinter spared him the death penalty; Henry was thus sentenced to life imprisonment, so that he was released "for good conduct in prison" and was able to fall back into his criminal tendencies as soon as he was released.

When the war was over, and the war profiteers reluctantly forced to recycle their arms factories into peace industries, Joseph-Albert opened a jewelry store and hired a 52-year-old watchmaker named Généreux Ruest. Généreux was a brilliant watchmaker but forced by a very disabling *bone tuberculosis* to move in a wheelchair. Joseph-Albert conceived a great vanity in giving work to a handicapped man in this way, even if this "altruism" was essentially aroused by the exceptional qualities of Généreux and not by the alleged benevolence of the boss.

Moreover, we will see at the end of this story worthy of the greatest Greek tragedians, inventors of the Dramatic Art, that Joseph-Albert did not hesitate for a moment to send his crippled employee to the horrible gallows for the sole purpose of recovering for himself a few days of survival. As soon as Généreux became the employee of this jeweler-watchmaker, his sister Marguerite Ruest, (wife Piètre), also began to take advantage of Joseph-Albert's generosity. He lent her money when she needed it. He even granted her enough to celebrate her second marriage with some pomp in the early spring of 1949.

All these presents had the sole purpose of making her a servile and complacent slave. A year earlier, she had invited Joseph-Albert to the Miranda Restaurant where she worked. She wanted to thank him for his infinite generosity, encourage him to continue in this momentum, and perhaps forge closer ties with this man who was so kind to her brother and to herself. As a royal gift of her infinite gratitude, Marguerite had put him in touch with the brilliant youth of Marie-Ange Robitaille, a young colleague barely 14 years old, who worked with her.

On the spot, Joseph-Albert had fallen madly in love with the fresh girl. After some foreplay necessary to gain her trust and many gifts to promote the blossoming of reciprocal feelings, or at least to totally enslave the child to his corrupting "generosity", he invited Marie-Ange to Marguerite's apartment, so kindly ceded as a love-nest. Everything was happening, of course, without the knowledge of Rita, his wife. Over the months, Joseph-Albert became himself a slave to the sublime charms of the irresistible Marie-Ange.



Marguerite Pitre. Priv. Coll.

At the same time, Marguerite and her colleague were quickly "addicted", as if by a drug, to the princely gifts or interest-free loans (at least without tax interest) of the same Joseph-Albert. Walked through the green meadows of easy money, Marguerite accumulated a debt¹⁹ of \$ 600 for her new wedding, a sum that she would probably never have the

ways to repay. As a result, she felt herself the debtor, the obligated, totally subject to the will of the one she

¹⁹ •Probably about \$60,000, while salaries were at an average level of \$15 or \$20 gross per week for restaurant waitresses. This second marriage was with Maurice Pitre.

considered her rich benefactor. Knowing Joseph-Albert's all-out perversion, it seems certain that the man lent large sums of money only for the sole purpose of enslaving his entourage to his own will.

This situation would take her much further than she had anticipated! The innocent Marie-Ange escaped, fortunately, without the slightest contusion but with internal bruises that undoubtedly had a lot of trouble healing. By embarking on this sentimental adventure with a minor, Guay had renounced his personal tranquility. Loving a single person is already very complicated, but life quickly becomes insoluble when you have several choices.

Did Joseph-Albert still love his wife Rita²⁰. He had a daughter with her during their twelve years together? Despite her still graceful face and eyes sparkling with intelligence, this *callipygian* beauty had become heavily coated over time. And then how to compete with a fully female girl who lined up then only 14 springs, with a thin and flexible panther body, with eyes capable of capsizing, despite her first name, the will of the austere Saint-Benedict himself²¹. Especially since she also showed him real feelings of attachment. Today, youth protection laws would have led Joseph-Albert behind bars in the Civil Prison of

²⁰ • Aged 29 at the beginning of her husband's affair with Marie-Ange.

²¹ •Saint-Benedict de Mont-Olivet-Majeur was famous for his virtue. Abbé Florent, a fellow very jealous of his fame, tried several times to have him murdered, then to make him sink into debauchery by sending him the most beautiful women who stripped naked in front of him... in vain. Benedict chased them away with fiery brandons to prevent them from throwing themselves on his person in order to overcome his incorruptible will. The jealous man did not get his money's worth and got an eternal reputation for ignominy and abjection.

Quebec City that was then on the Plains of Abraham²², and this would have avoided the hemp rope, but at that already distant time, child abuse was not —or so little— sanctioned by the Laws, too permissive in this area.

In the spring of 1949, under constant pressure from the young girl who threatened to abandon him, Joseph-Albert left his wife under the pretext of a deliberately provoked dispute, and moved to Sept-Îles, deep on the North Shore, beyond the St. Lawrence Estuary, on the green-shadowy shores of the vast Gulf. The pretty Marie-Ange joined him discreetly to live with him. But it took only a few months for the beautiful teenager to realize that her lover had absolutely no intention of divorcing his wife, nor the power to wrest any legal separation from the Quebec Administration, without him losing half of his property. Gripped then by her conscience, which objected to the horrible situation of cohabitation —cohabitation so banal and innocuous nowadays where marriage seems to seduce only gay people— the girl refused to continue living together with him and returned to Quebec.

As for separating from his wife, Joseph-Albert had initially thought of divorce, but the price was prohibitive in order to discourage the poorest population. And then Joseph-Albert categorically opposed the idea of dividing the family's property, especially since he would receive only the congruous portion, being the "culprit", the person responsible for the legal separation. It was probably at this crucial moment, under the brutal shock of this

²² •This Plains Prison was closed in 1970 and transformed first into an *Auberge de Jeunesse* (Youth Hostel) and then into an Exhibition Pavilion.

heartbreaking departure of the girl he loved passionately like a drug addict his dope, that he coldly decided to get rid once and for all of his cumbersome wife.

For his own freedom, Joseph-Albert offered his wife a vacation in Baie-Comeau. Yet, not content with getting rid of this hindrance that thwarted what he believed to be his happiness, he could not resist the pleasure of gaining a complementary benefit from her death. He took out a \$10,000 life insurance policy on Rita Guay-Morel's head. Thus, this death would kill two birds with one stone. Unfortunately for him, the stone would ricochet, or rather return to the manner of a boomerang.

This insurance policy was the grain of sand that messed up the mechanism of the perfect crime. Such was the backstage of his plot. Only he had an overview of the scheme and all the tortuous implications... without exception. The preparations lasted three full months. It is essential to insist that only he knew the ins and outs of the crime he was plotting in his head. He had foreseen all the outcomes except the ultimate: his death by hanging.

Indeed, if Marguerite Pitre had been aware of Joseph-Albert's criminal plan —to dynamite a plane with her passengers— there is no doubt that she would have warned Marie-Ange, the waitress who worked with her. Joseph-Albert guessed that such a criminal project would have scuttled the love of his beautiful mistress for him. Consequently, it seems certain that Marguerite Pitre was totally unaware that a mass crime was being prepared, even though she herself carried the bomb to the plane. How could she have imagined that a gentleman as

extraordinary as Joseph-Albert, who watered everyone with sumptuous gifts, could premeditate such a monstrosity?

To achieve his goals, Joseph-Albert first asked his watchmaker to invent a mechanism to set off a time bomb that was to be used to "*blow up a huge rock*". This rock degraded the appearance and value of the land in his holiday cottage. The timer would have to give him time to get away at a good distance so as not to be injured or killed by the explosion and shrapnel that could fall very far."

Généreux Ruest brilliantly created a very sophisticated watchmaking mechanism. As for the explosive, the dark Joseph-Albert, very cautious despite everything, because he was the only one to know his own intentions and the real purposes of dynamite, avoided showing himself in one of the hardware stores of the city where TNT sticks for earthworks were then freely sold. As said above, the Machiavellian jeweler instead instructed Marguerite to buy under a false name a few sticks of explosive at the hardware store in the neighborhood. He had explained to her that the pseudonym would avoid complications with the police and justice in the event of a fortuitous accident: for example, if the bomb exploded accidentally in Quebec City or on the way.

Everything was easy in mid-twentieth-century Québec; easy for terrorists who did not yet exist in this country, before the FLQ²³ revolt and the attack from the

²³ •The Front de Libération du Québec, from 1962. Dynamite was discovered by the Swede Alfred Nobel in 1867. His discovery earned him the international nickname of the Greatest Man-Killer. He then created the Nobel Peace Prize to clear his name.

Anglophone Richard-Henry Bain²⁴. On August 18th, 1949, Marguerite bought the seven sticks of dynamite from the Samson et Fillion hardware store. She simply planted her seven red sticks in her large shopping bag between the macaroni, meat, and cans of fèves-au-lard. This medium-strength trinitrotoluene cost \$10, which Joseph-Albert reimbursed her, as well as the box of electric detonators and the copper wire.

At Joseph-Albert's express request, she signed Louise Côté at the bottom of the official receipt. Identity card did not exist. Even today, the driver's license, illustrated with a photo, serves as an identification document.



On that cool morning of September 9, Généreux Ruest carefully set off the bomb's timer and set it to explode fifteen minutes after the plane took off... if the aircraft was punctual. Joseph-Albert Guay had calculated that the aircraft would then have to fly over the vast Estuary of the St. Lawrence. Thus, the sunken wreck could not be examined in detail by the judicial authorities who would never be able to know whether the explosion was criminal or fortuitous. The evil plan had to be infallible and safe,... safe for the criminal.

Only a few minutes before the plane took off, Marguerite Pitre-Ruest, loaded with her dangerous statue of

²⁴ •On September 4th, 2012, during a speech in the great hall of the Metropolis to celebrate the victory of the Parti Québécois in the provincial election, this Anglophone, after trying to burn down the Metropolis, entered the room with a semi-automatic rifle and a pistol (officially registered weapons) with the aim of assassinating the new Premier of Quebec, Pauline Marois. He killed a 48-year-old father, Denis Blanchette, and then his weapons, poorly maintained, stopped. He was then arrested as he shouted in French: *Les Anglais se réveillent!* (The English are waking up!)

the Virgin Mary stuffed with dynamite, arrived at the Gare du Palais railway station with its multiple verdigris copper roofs. Did she know that the base of the very artistic statue that she carried with a thousand precautions, was stuffed with dynamite? Yes, of course. Her boss wanted to destroy a boulder. If she had removed the bottom of the wood, she would have seen a pack of seven red sticks – sparkling poppies – which stood fraternally by the black tail of their wick, like young elephants. They were the same ones she had bought in a Québec City's store. Yes! However, Marguerite could never have imagined that the purpose of this infernal machine was not the rock of Rivière-aux-Pins but the plane and its passengers. Such a crime remained for her in the realm of the unimaginable!

At the Gare du Palais, according to the advice of her lord and master, she changed taxis to go to the airport of L'Ancienne-Lorette, still with her statue of which she might have heard the threatening ticking if she had had the crazy idea of sticking her ear to the paper. Fortunately, in the 1950s, car traffic jams were nothing infuriating, nothing comparable to those of today. Otherwise, Marguerite Pitre-Ruest would have played the involuntary role of the first female kamikaze bomber in the history of Humanity! The change of taxi was intended to muddy the waters.

—*How could you go out of your way without knowing that your act was criminal?* the police asked.

It was quite simple: she explained that she foolishly obeyed her master-thinker, that the clock worked, certainly, but *that she did not know that the trigger was planned*. She followed, like a good soldier, his orders to

the letter. According to psychiatrists who later looked into her intelligence quotient, she could not have joined *Mensa International*, which had just been created. Still, she repeatedly asked the driver to drive carefully because "*the package was dangerous*," according to what the taxi driver claimed during the trial. Marguerite denied using the adjective *dangerous*, but explained that she knew the package contained *a fragile statue* of the Virgin. It's likely!

On September 9th, 1949, on a chilly Friday morning, Marguerite arrived by taxi at the Ancienne-Lorette Airport in Quebec City at the *Post Express Counter* to send the package addressed to Alfred Plouffe at the civic number 180 rue Laval in Baie-Comeau [PQ]. It was Joseph-Albert Guay who cynically chose this onomatopoeic name "Plouffe", which evoked the tragedy since the bomb was set for the plane to fall into the brackish waters of the St. Lawrence Estuary, in places where the Police would not easily find the wreckage.

—It is, she tells the employees, a fragile statue intended for a friend of Saint-Siméon in the county of Charlevoix.

Here again, she strictly followed the orders of her master in whom she had absolute trust. Yet, as is so often the case, a grain of sand crept into the well-oiled course of this crime, and, curiously, this grain of sand was introduced by Joseph-Albert Guay himself.



When the passengers boarded, an argument arose between Rita, who did not want to leave to these holidays on the North Shore, and Joseph-Albert, who forced her to take

this plane. She felt like she was abandoning her husband, whom she still loved, in the sulfurous hands of his all-consuming passions, obsessions that besieged him night and day. Perhaps Rita also did not want to board, mysteriously warned by a distant hunch? And Joseph-Albert had to force her with violent anger, feigned or real. *Angry peoples are, in fact, only dark manipulators. They know very well that their bad mood will force the hand and the obedience of the recalcitrant, the naysayers.* The violent anger lasted only five short minutes. Then Rita entered the airplane to die. Joseph-Albert won. We were still at the very beginning of mass aviation and the pilot patiently waited for everything to return to order to take off with these five insignificant minutes of delay... that would change everything.



For the police officers who scratched their heads while trying to unravel the Gordian knot of the investigation, something became quickly very clear. If Joseph-Albert had orchestrated the arrangement of the various elements of this crime, it was most likely the pendulum maker Généreux Ruest, very good at inventing sophisticated watchmaking mechanisms, who had developed the bomb.

His sister Marguerite had simply brought and shipped the time-bomb. Marguerite Pitre-Ruest, the most vulnerable, was first arrested and soon the dark Raven began to sing a sad lamentation like in Amy Winchouse's repertoire. Marguerite had been married for the first time in 1934 and again in 1949. Her first husband had died

accidentally and the second, Maurice Pitre, died of despair on May 5th, 1952, shortly after Marguerite's execution. As mentioned above, they had married thanks to the dollars lent by Joseph-Albert.

L'éternel trio: l'époux : Joseph-Albert. L'épouse Rita au centre. La concubine Marie-Ange à droite



Finally, the plane bound for Baie-Comeau and then Sept-Îles took off with its twenty-three passengers²⁵. A few minutes later, it was flying over Cap-Tourmente²⁶, 60 km from Quebec City, above the Sault-au-Cochon, when it exploded. Thus, the wreckage could be examined with meticulousness. That totally changed the perspective of the investigators. The *Preliminary Investigation*, or Coroner's Inquest, concerning the criminal jeweler, attracted a

²⁵ •We were not yet at the huge Airbus of 700 seats.

²⁶ •Cap Tourmente was named so in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain who had noticed that at the slightest wind the sea became rough and dismounted.

considerable number of curious people, passionate about this exceptional act.



The trial that followed only prolonged this effervescence. It took place in Québec City at the end of February 1950. It was an extraordinary event that caused floods of ink, saliva and cold sweat to flow. If this was the first crime of this type, it was far from being the last because fanatics and failures of the whole world, greedy for celebrity, anarchists, fanatics Sikhs and, then, suicidal Islamists, naïve bundles of all faiths, morons of all allegiances, captagon-fueled scoundrels, all were diabolically inspired by the sneering demon of the Erostrate Syndrome.

In the box of the Accused, Joseph-Albert remained cold and imperturbable in the storm of hatred whose invective crushed his face as soon as he appeared in public. The room of the Assizes Court was full and the overheated populace shouted passionately: "*Kill him! Kill him! Môôôdit!*" Quebecers, usually so debonair, so tolerant, were outraged by the scale and vileness of the crime. But when the beautiful Marie-Ange took the witness stand during the trial, with her dazzling beauty and obvious angelism, she appeared to the audience as an orchid miraculously hatched on a buffalo dung.

Marie-Ange evoked with tears in her eyes her adulterous affair with the murderer; adulterous for Joseph-Albert but not for her. The audience drank her words. She was so beautiful that boys and men understood that they too would be able to lose their minds to win her love. And

women could not help but envy such sublime beauty as they tried to imagine what privileges they could avail themselves if they held such a magical power, capable of reducing almost all men to the state of submissive slaves. She seemed the divine Aphrodite descended from Mount Olympus to delight humans with magical voluptuousness. Everyone contemplated her with fascination, speechless, eyes rounded, bewitched by an inexplicable spell. And suddenly, with the casualness of a teenager who has simply changed her whim, Marie-Ange concludes her brief testimony with a lapidary and carefree:

—I don't love him anymore!

To these incredible and simple words, all the round eyes and the open mouths were carried with the same overall movement on the face of Joseph-Albert who contemplated her with passion as Bernadette Soubirous must undoubtedly have admired the Lourdes Virgin Mary. And suddenly everyone saw the face of the old lover petrified, becoming ash color, whitish²⁷, as if his body had solidified into a salt statue. It was a deluge of despair and bitterness on Joseph-Albert Guay's heart. This love had electrified him to the point of total anesthesia, to the point of committing this irreparable massacre to possess her infinite beauty idealized by love and her dream body, as exhilarating as a sidereal trip into opiomania. Without Marie-Ange, Joseph-Albert lost his reason for existing and for life itself!

In front of Judge Sévigny, the Prosecutor of the King, Me. Noël Dorion, was determined to send the accused to the gallows. The Defense was in the talented

²⁷ •According to a witness of the trial named Roger Lemelin.

hands of Bertrand Marcotte and Gérard Lévesque, two tenors of the Quebec bar. Joseph-Albert Guay pleaded not guilty. Despite its *Napoleonic Civil Code*, the Province of Québec had been imposed the *English Criminal Law System*, itself derived from the French Law that was once imposed on England by the French Province of Normandy, at the time when this province had colonized Great-Britain (1066).

The accused was not under any obligation to answer questions that were too incriminating. It was up to the Prosecution to convince the jury beyond a reasonable doubt. Although he was not compelled to do so, Généreux Ruest agreed to testify. He admitted to having created the mechanism so that the trigger was "delayed". He claimed to have believed in good faith that it was to dynamite a rocky terrain. The clock worked, of course, but the mechanism for triggering the detonator was not set. Joseph Albert had settled it himself before entrusting the time-bomb to Marguerite on the morning of the crime.

Prosecutor Noël Dorion paraded some experts to establish the cause of the accident. Yes! It was indeed a bomb that had destroyed the DC 3 in flight. He then called Marguerite Pitre-Ruest to the bar. "*Joseph-Albert Guay had commissioned her a few days before to buy dynamite and detonators for, she said, blowing up rocks in front of her cottage.*" Then he handed her the fateful package. *No!* *She (Marguerite) was not Joseph-Albert Guay's mistress!* She probably would have liked it and this question must have titillated her heart. But Marguerite had an *offended gesture as if to reassure her new husband* who was in the

room. She had only been married for two months. Joseph-Albert was only her creditor. She had borrowed a tidy sum of \$600.00²⁸ that she hoped not to have to repay. And because of this, she had become his obligate, his slave.

In response to questions from Prosecutor Noël Dorion, Marguerite even said that, a few days after the tragedy, Joseph-Albert Guay had ordered her to commit suicide. Then, as she hesitated, he threatened her, swearing to her that if she did not obey, he himself would hang her after torturing her. By persisting in his refusal, she would only attract additional suffering by the torture he was going to inflict on her. In a brief moment, the handsome gentleman had become a furious rottweiler, a mad executioner. As a result, as mentioned above, Marguerite Pitre had to be hospitalized in Basse-Ville, after a suicide attempt. But... Is it a suicide when you are forced to commit suicide?

A police inspector came to testify. He explained that Joseph-Albert Guay had taken out a life insurance of \$10,000 Canadian dollars (200,000 today) on his wife's head just before take-off... The Prosecutor was swimming in the certainties he wanted to share with the jurors. Pointing to Joseph-Albert his index and middle finger, like the superimposed canons of a Colt Python .357 Magnum²⁹, he delivered a damning indictment against the killer. He painted of him the image of a licentious and lustful manipulator, which had not hesitated to seduce a teenage girl, get rid of his wife and kill twenty-two other innocent people

²⁸ About \$60,000 today.

²⁹ •This handgun has only one barrel, of course. But the axis of the baricaut gives the impression of a double cannon.

so that he could enjoy perfect love with his mistress. He had also cashed in the insurance payment.

The Defense attorneys, Bertrand Marcotte and Gérard Lévesque, tried to cast doubt on the prosecution's case and on the testimony of Marguerite Ruest-Pitre, whose role was indeed equivocal. We might as well try to erode the Precambrian rock of Northern Quebec. *Yes, it was she who lent her home to organize the stealth meetings between Joseph-Albert and Marie-Ange.* This argument, which today, in our century of permissiveness, seems insignificant, was considerable at that duplessist time³⁰, when *everything that was not forbidden remained obligatory*.

Finally, after 17 days of Assizes Court, on March 15th, Joseph Albert Guay was found guilty of mass murder. The most convincing prosecution witnesses were the brother and sister Ruest, Généreux and Marguerite. At the opening of his Assizes trial in February, Guay had already recovered, despite popular hatred. He even joked with his guards. By what strength or unconsciousness of the mind could he thus maintain confidence in his future? It was his unwavering will, presumably, and his immense fatuity that always allowed him to develop effective solutions to control his life and build his Destiny according to his own will. Even his crime had been well organized, with the exception of the small delay of 5 minutes that had made everything fail.

³⁰ •Maurice Duplessis was the Premier of Québec from 1936 to 1939, then from 1944 to 1959. Its fascistic Petainist tendencies were not counterbalanced (as in France) by a Stalinist or Maoist Extreme Left Wing as fanatical and intolerant as they were.

Usually believers find their strength in their religion: *God will help me, I'm sure!* But Joseph-Albert, visceral disbeliever, found this strength in himself, in his indestructible optimism: I will build a solution, a ruse that will give me happiness and avoid the scaffold! Moreover, among the surnames having their source in sobriquets, his name (Guay, old spelling of gai)³¹ meant that his ancestors were optimistic and happy in a natural and spontaneous way.

When the jury handed down its *guilty* verdict, after a brief deliberation, Guay was nothing more than a human foulbrood. He trembled with all his limbs, his face bathed in tears of fright. Ah! It was no longer the arid sobs in front of the police and journalists, when he contemplated the tangled bodies around the wreckage of the plane: "*My poor wife!*" he had whispered to exonerate himself from any blame in the minds of those who interpreted his body language.

Such was the indignation aroused among the Quebec population by the death of all these innocent victims that Joseph-Albert Guay was found guilty in just seventeen minutes. That's probably a record! Curiously, in the same breath, *the jury recommended Clemency*, which meant that he was going to escape the gallows. The incredible cruelty and complexity of the crime could only have been the fruit of a mind eaten away by a kind of creative perversion. Dementia pure and simple! And we don't execute a madman! As for Généreux and Marguerite Ruest, the Crown simply

³¹ •The modern meaning of homosexual attributed to the word gay is very recent. It would come from San Francisco where homosexuals used it as a rallying word; they could recognize themselves by asking, "Do you know some gay place in this city?"

dropped all charges against them. But Judge Sévigny ignored Clémence's Recommendation. He didn't want any free passes. And on June 23rd his sentence fell like a... guillotine: *the rope*, nothing less!



Thus, according to the supreme will of the jurors, this killing could have stopped there, at the 24th death, including the killer himself. But Joseph-Albert had not yet demonstrated in what abyssal depth of perversity and degradation he could descend, just to snatch from Fate a few more miserable days of survival, a few shreds of existence, even if it was necessary to send to death the two beings he had dragged without their knowledge into his horrible crime. Thus, with zeal and determination, he murdered without the slightest scruples two other innocents.

A month before the date of his execution, his days and especially his nights were haunted by bars, nooses, and gallows, not to mention the magma of compressed human bodies at the front of the plane that he had glimpsed during his visit. This perverse-narcissist man decided that he would not go alone to discover this Underworld, unknown and distressing, of which so many things were said, often negative. Perhaps he thought that a mass arrival would trivialize his own entry into Satan's Kingdom, and that if he showed up with innocent unjustly convicted people, he might benefit from a general amnesty by blending into the group; a bit like the *Tsadiquims of the Shoah*, all sent *en masse* to Paradise, even if the souls of some would not, in normal times, have crossed the Glorious Gates of the Paradise:

—We are deeply sorry for this misstep of the Heavenly Administration. As you know, our scribe officials are all more than millennial old men next to whom the famous Methuselah of Genesis was just a kid. Please accept our apologies, and as compensation, follow me, you are all going to Paradise!

Until then in human history, only the Latter-day Saints could draw ancestors from the Hell of any religion, to convert them and send them to the Mormon Paradise³².¹ One can easily imagine the sneers of joy of the sardonic assassin who wanted to think that "*all would go to Paradise*"³³. But the true story of this crime was not so crazy. After giving the impression that he was abandoning the game to submit to his inevitable Destiny, Joseph-Albert Guay suddenly raised his head after a month, and summoned to his tiny cell in the prison of Bordeaux, none other than the King's Prosecutor. He wanted to dictate a confession of 114 pages in which he unequivocally implicated brother and sister Ruest.

According to his belated false accusations, "*both knew that the bomb was going to be used to blow up a plane and not a rock in his cottage. As a reward, Marguerite's \$600 debt had been paid off; as for Généreux, he had also received substantial sums of money for "his good and loyal services"*" in this heinous crime that would make him

³² •The Mormon *Beyond the Grave* is called *Spirit World*. Mormons can transfer their ancestors there as long as they know their name and date of birth. Heaven is Paradise and Hell is the *Spirit Prison*.

³³ •As Marie Balmary and Daniel Marguerat explained so well, not François Ponthier.

eternally famous until the End of Time, thanks to his Erostrate Syndrome.

On the basis of these suspicious accusations, the Prosecutor did not go into half measures. Happy to have two new human lives to get his teeth into, he charged the two Ruest with first degree murder, and had them immediately incarcerated. As for Joseph-Albert's execution, which was initially scheduled for June 23rd, it should have been delayed —to his delight— in anticipation of the likely event that he would have to testify during the Ruest Preliminary Inquiry.

The attorneys of Marguerite Pitre-Ruest tried to prolong Joseph-Albert Guay's life to cross-examine him and show that *he was lying*. But they ended in failure. The Prosecutor considered it unnecessary to request a new stay in anticipation of the trial of "the Pitre woman" as the hateful journalists had taken the bad habit of calling her. As soon as the usefulness of the witness ceased to be indispensable, the Prosecutor sent him, on January 12th, 1951, to the gallows of Bordeaux, the famous balcony pierced by two large metal hatches. The carelessness with which the trials of the two Guays were conducted was so shocking that it could only suggest that the death penalty should be abolished so that it would not be used in such abusive conditions by incompetent and unintelligent magistrates.



Joseph-Albert's execution was described in detail by a journalist from **LE SOLEIL DE QUÉBEC**, whose January 12th, 1951 edition was delayed for this purpose: "Joseph-

Albert Guay, the man whose ambition was to become rich as soon as possible, died on the scaffold shortly after midnight this morning in the Prison of Bordeaux." Almost to the end, Guay, who obviously suffered from Erostratus Syndrome³⁴, kept the illusion of being a person who was out of the ordinary. "*At least I'm dying famous!*" he told his guards yesterday. Before he climbed onto the scaffold, "the prisoner attended Mass and received the Holy Communion. This special mass of the condemned to death was celebrated by Father Lucien Clermont, chaplain of the prison of Bordeaux. Mass began within minutes of midnight.

After a few moments of meditation, at the end of the Holy Sacrifice, Guay, warned that the hour of execution had arrived, shook hands with his guards, the Governor of the prison, Mr. Yvon Lessage, the chaplain, thanked them for their good care, and, with a firm step, walked towards the gallows, reciting special prayers aloud." Prison officials commented after the hanging: "This is the first time that a convict on the road to death has behaved in such a way." Guay went up to the gallows around 0:25. At 0:33 a.m., doctors Auguste Clément and Roméo Plouffe —a name that recalled the beginning of his adventure, like a boomerang— declared him dead. Immediately, the bells of the Bordeaux prison sounded the death knell to

³⁴ •Erostratus who wanted to become famous, which was for him a way to overcome death by surviving in History, voluntarily burned for this purpose, in 356 BC, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus (Asia Minor i.e. present day Turkey: Efes in the city of Smyrna, Izmir today in Turkey), one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Erostratus actually became famous while the architect who built the temple is long forgotten. The Syndrome of Erostratus is therefore a mental illness that pushes the individual to commit crimes to make people talk about him and thus obtain the immortality of memory. Some psychiatrists attribute the suicide of Islamic kamikaze bombers to Erostastus Syndrome.

announce with their gloomy 7-spasms that human Justice had passed for a man.

The execution took place very quickly. The news was announced by the Deputy Sheriff, Mr. Paul Herteau. Last-minute efforts had been attempted by Guay's attorneys to delay his execution, but yesterday afternoon the authorities announced that the sentence was to take its course. In Ottawa and Quebec, the Defense attorneys tried desperately, at the eleventh hour, to obtain a stay of execution for Joseph-Albert Guay. Meanwhile, the convict was doing his last crossword puzzles.

"In Guay's entourage, it is said that *he had always had the ambition to get rich quickly and draw attention to himself.*" This official description³⁵ of Joseph-Albert Guay's last moments, which presents him, without a shadow of a doubt, as a courageous being, must nevertheless be nuanced by the following few details: the first air terrorist in the history of Humanity, certainly walked to the gallows to receive the execution of his death sentence. But the firmness of his step faltered quite quickly to such an extent that he had to be transported to the fatal balcony pierced by a hatch, for his trembling legs finally refused to cooperate. And, while the executioner and the guards wore him, he candidly asked:

—Does it hurt?... Will I be conscious when my neck breaks?... Do we die instantly?...

³⁵ •This tasteless text had been distributed to journalists who had not been admitted to the killing so as not to arouse the opposition of the abolitionists. The following details came from the guards.

His attitude was clearly not as firm as that of Erostratus, who was tortured, following the barbaric customs of Greco-Latin antiquity (no matter what the Hellenists say.)



The execution of Généreux Ruest, disabled, wrongly incriminated by the assassin only to gain a few days of survival, was an even more lamentable spectacle. Some even called it repugnant, because not only was the man undoubtedly innocent of this monstrous crime, but the authorities did not shrink from the unspeakable solution of hanging this disabled man in his wheelchair. Despite his denials of guilt, Généreux Ruest was tried before a jury and sentenced to death on December 13th, 1950. His Appeal was dismissed by the indifferent Supreme Court of Canada. King George VI of England³⁶, even more casual, refused his Grace.

The acting Governor General of Canada, Thibaudieu Rinfret, rejected any remission. As a result, the disabled man was executed on July 25th, 1952 *in his wheelchair*, presumably to inaugurate the reign of Elizabeth II with dignity. *He was carried at arm's length to the balcony of the execution and sat on his wheelchair which had previously been placed on the large metal hatch.* The executioner then covered his head with a hood, passed the rope around his neck, and as soon as the hatch opened, the chair began to rock at the same time as the condemned man.

³⁶ •It was the father of Elizabeth II. The latter did not begin her reign until two years later, on February 6th, 1952.

This wheelchair was kept in a prison office as a reminiscence of this repugnant crime, like the scar of a shameful wound. Generous Ruest was hanged for making the bomb. A journalist wrote that day: "Généreux Ruest, a 54-year-old crippled watchmaker from Quebec City, was hanged early today, thus paying with his life for the part he had taken in the explosion of an airbus in 1949. Suffering from bone tuberculosis and unable to walk alone, Ruest was transported in a wheelchair from his cell in Bordeaux's common prison to the scaffold. The hatch opened at 1:12 tonight.

Ruest had attended Mass at half past midnight. Father Roger Jeanotte, chaplain of the prison, lavished him with the last spiritual help at the foot of the scaffold. His hopes of a stay of execution vanished yesterday, when the Federal Cabinet rejected a final request to the Minister of Justice. Mr. Stuart Garson Ruegi had requested a new trial or the commutation of the death penalty to life imprisonment. He is the second person to face the death penalty for the murder of Mrs. Guay."



Following the unjust and false denunciation of Joseph-Albert Guay, Marguerite Ruest (Mrs. Pitre), was herself incarcerated and charged, not with murder, but with aiding a person wishing to perpetrate an assassination. She was tried before a jury and sentenced on March 19th, 1951, to be hanged by the neck until death ensued, according to this medieval formula. Of the three participants, she was

the one who kept her dignity and calm before death with a supreme phlegm "*worthy of an Iroquois*³⁷."

As journalists refused to grant "*the Pitre woman*" any title of virtue, her composure was simply accused of insensitivity, indifference, impassibility, icy calm, and a thousand other unenviable deficiencies that did her a disservice with the jurors. Yet this phlegm hid an immense anger and contempt for all those who participated in her killing: judges, policemen, guards and magistrates. According to one guard, she never calmed down and "swore like a carter." "She looked like a whipping fury³⁸ whipping right and left without worrying about the injuries she could inflict... The bunch of idiots... and the bunch of tabarnaks were having a bad time³⁹."

On January 8th, 1953, Marguerite Ruest-Pitre was transferred from the Women's Prison on Fulham Street in Montreal to the death row cell at the Bordeaux Prison. It was during this transfer that she shouted to the journalists, real raptors who came to snatch a few snippets of sentences that would appear on five-columns-on-first-page in the following daily: "*They are not allowed to do this to me!*"

The jury found her guilty in less than 30 minutes. The Appeal of his conviction was narrowly dismissed

³⁷ •The Iroquois killed their prisoners under torture and considered virtuous those who knew how to die without complaint and without showing the slightest sign of pain. It was a sight that the Iroquois Nations loved when French or Indian prisoners were captured. They themselves remained unperturbed in pain.

³⁸ •Duguay, 1979,

³⁹ •Duguay: "Bunch of jerks and bunch of tabarnaks were having a hard time, prison guards and police". p.72.

(three votes to two) by the judges of the Québec Court of Appeal. The date of execution was set for January 9th, 1953. The Supreme Court of Canada also refused his Appeal. His two sons, Maurice and Jean-Guy, appealed to the Government and to the new Queen Elizabeth II, who had not yet been officially crowned, to spare their mother's life: "*We learned in yesterday's newspaper that our mother is going to be hanged. I'm not 20 years old yet and I'm not working yet. My little brother Jean-Guy is thirteen years old and not in good health. What will we become if mom is hanged? She always took care of us, to dress us, housing and feeding us. We don't know how to tell you, but do something to save our Mom.*"

But the queen ignored this heartbreakingly imploring of the two children. She simply returned the letter to the Governor General of Canada who allowed this innocent woman to be executed.

To arrive on the balcony-scaffold of the Bordeaux prison, Marguerite Pitre-Ruest was escorted by two nuns. "*La Pitre* walked resolutely towards the scaffold," wrote a guard full of grudges for the insults he had suffered from her. She went there as we go to the local baker to buy bread... When the priest, standing on one of the side balconies, presented her with the crucifix to be kissed, she turned disdainfully to the executioner whom she apostrophized with aplomb in very cavalier terms:

—OK, Arthur, waste no time!⁴⁰

⁴⁰ •Duguay.

From there, she had a last bird's eye view over the prison courtyard where silent and motionless spectators stood. And just before the executioner passed her the hood and the knot around her neck, she shouted to the spectators and the hundreds of inmates who appeared behind bars in the multiple cells of the prison: "*I would like to say something... I would like to say this for my children. Christ was condemned by Pontius Pilate and he was delivered into the hands of Caiaphas⁴¹, and today is my hour! That's all I had to say!"*

Did she still hope to move the hearts of all those who attended her last moments? It was certainly not a good idea to compare herself to Jesus, but what would we have said in her place? Would we have been brighter and calmer, knowing we are innocent? A stroke of wit or anger would have had more impact on everyone. These were the last words of an innocent woman.

The Canada executioner Camille Branchaud, who had been cavalierly "called Arthur", calmly let her finish her sentence despite the impertinent interpellation to which he had been subjected. Then he put on her hood to mask the grimaces of agony, and set off the hatch with a kick, in the hubbub of the screams of several hundred inmates who witnessed the horror live, happy to be only the spectators⁴².

⁴¹ •Caiaphas was the High Priest of the Temple of Jerusalem. The High Priest had been appointed to this position of choice thanks to the support of his father-in-law, the High Priest Anân, and kept himself in place with the support of his very wealthy family, and also thanks to his collaboration with the occupying power, the Romans.

⁴² •Marguerite Pitre's energetic behavior with the executioner (OK! Arthur, waste no time!), can be compared to that of the horrible Irma Grese, nicknamed The Hyena of Auschwitz, a former guard of Nazi extermination camps, who had distinguished herself

Marguerite made Canadian History by becoming the last of 13 women executed under Canadian Confederation between 1872 and 1953. In 1976, Canada abolished the death penalty for civilians, having executed 697 men and thirteen women by hanging⁴³. Marguerite Pitre was the Augustin Trébuchon⁴⁴ of capital punishment. She was innocent herself. For the last time in the history of the Bordeaux prison, the bell vibrated ten times to announce the execution of a woman, as it had rung seven times for each of the two men.



This terrorist accident traumatized the world's population, but the public was already accustomed to non-terrorist air accidents thanks to the Vickers Viscount commercial aircraft that broke all crash records between 1952 and 1997: 160 accidents for a total of 450 aircraft built in this model. Eventually the English succeeded in selling their last Vickers Viscount to African Commonwealth countries, facilitating and embellishing the sale with convincing bribes offered to politicians. Most also ended up in accidents, resulting in many more victims.

by her extreme sadism. She was hanged by the English executioner Albert Pierrepoint in Hamelin prison in Germany on December 13th, 1945. The executioner recounted in his Memoirs that, as he put on the white linen hood on her head, their eyes crossed. The executioner noticed that Irma's eyes were large and very blue, and that she had long black eyelashes that beat softly, at a pace that seemed to be that of her heart. As the executioner contemplated these magnificent eyes, Irma said to him in German, "Schnell!" [Fast!]. Coming out of his reverie, Pierrepont adjusted the hood and triggered the hatch.

⁴³ •The execution of military personnel by courts martial was prohibited in 1999.

⁴⁴ •Augustin Trébuchon was the last soldier killed in the First World War. He was killed 10 minutes before the Armistice.

As happens very often, this crime inspired other citizens of the world to get rich in the same way. Two years after the execution of Marguerite Pitre-Ruest, an American named Jack Gilbert Graham placed a bomb on November 1st, 1955, on the plane that was operating *United Airlines Flight 629*. Jack had taken out life insurance on the head of his poor old mother who occupied one of the seats on the plane. Beforehand, he had given her a farewell kiss on the cheek, like Judas Iscariot. As an excuse, he claimed that she had abused him as a child. He escaped the gallows, but not... the electric chair.

This crime also inspired in 1982 a novel by the writer Roger Lemelin: *The Crime of Ovide Plouffe*, which was filmed two years later. The same crime served as the setting for a novel: *Cape Torment* by the English-speaking writer Richard Donovan.



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